REVIEWED: EVERY GAME RELEASED THIS MONTH!

**POPULOUS II**
Bullfrog's latest blockbuster - ACE readers have their say!

Issue 50
November 1991
£1.80

# ACE

ADVANCED COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

- AMIGA
- PC • ST
- MEGADRIVE
- GAMEBOY
- LYNX
- GAME GEAR
- FAMICOM

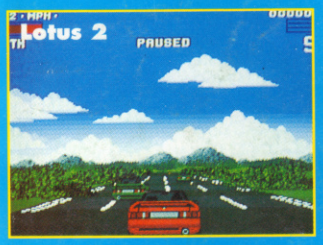
## TESTED!

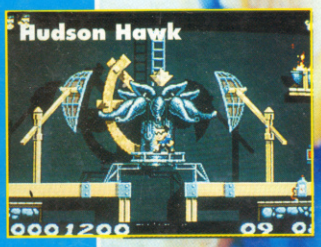
6-Page Super Reviews of:

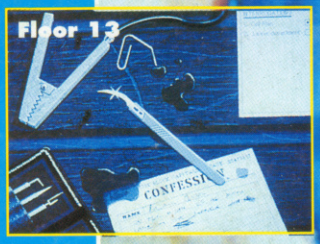
- LOTUS 2
- MIG 29M
- FLOOR 13
- HUDSON HAWK
- GRAND PRIX
- ALIEN BREED

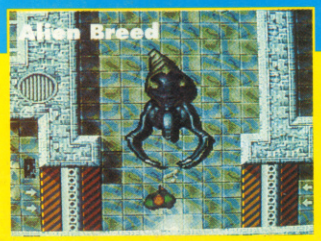
## ALIEN 3

This time, it's really, really personal!





## IN THE WORKS

Sneak previews of Christmas hits in development!

## PREVIEWED:

Parasol Stars, Apocalypse, Chaos Engine, Wizkid, Tip Off, Strike Commander & Many more!

## FREE!

Full Colour Tricks'n'Tactics Supplement

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# PLAY THE GAME MAN!

Hello fellow humans!
Bartholomew J. Simpson here, with a very important secret:

SPACE MUTANTS ARE INVADING SPRINGFIELD

That's right man! A buncha slimy, horrible, totally gross and putrid monsters are taking over the bodies of the people who live here and they wanna build a weapon that's gonna take over the entire planet!

PReTTy CoOL, HUh?

Anyway, yours truly is the only one who can see 'em! I've gotta spray-paint things, get radical on my skateboard, use my trusty slingshot, and in general behave like a nuisance, man.

Plus, with evil dudes like Nelson the bully and Sideshow Bob getting in my way, it's a good thing I've got the rest of the Simpsons to help me out!

So if you're a decent person a patriot, and somebody who cares about this sorry planet, you'll do the right thing.

SAVE THE EARTH

BUy THiS GaME!
Thanks man.

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# ACE

ISSUE 50 OCT 1991

**Let's face it. You've had to put up with some nonsense, haven't you? Low quality games and even lower quality mags. Reviews that lie and games that stink. But no more. Now it's all going to change.**

**Here is a mag that would not take it any more! Here is a mag that stood up!**

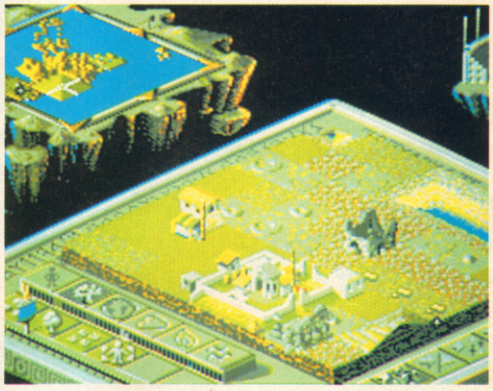
**Here is...**
**ACE Magazine.**

**Our aim is to deliver all the news on the games scene each month, quenching your thirst for facts in a refreshing and worthwhile style.**

**The world's most detailed reviews, the world's hottest games stories. Every new release reviewed and every review unimpeachable. Every month. Starting now.**

**18** Alien 3 from Mirrorsoft, this month's covergame is moving along at a fair old pace at the hands of Probe in leafy Croydon. ACE takes a sneaky preview. Exclusively, of course.

**23** Bullfrog, purveyors of fine software since Populous open their doors to a select number of ACE readers. Read about their secret projects and views on the games Biz in a special In the Works *live!*



**They say that the best things in life are free. And how right they are! Just look, dear reader, at the lovingly crafted Classic Tricks 'n' Tactics supplement provided entirely free with this issue. Detailed, worthwhile playguides for six of the best games on the market. And there's going to be another one next month!**

*Editor* Jim Douglas. *Deputy Editor* David Upchurch. *Art Editor* Jim Willis. *Designer* Jenny Abrook. *Staff Writer* Gary Whitta. *Contributors* Rik Haynes, Chris Jenkins. *Photography* Edward Park. *Advertising Manager* David Ward. *Senior Sales Executive* Tina Zanelli. *Advertising Production* Melanie Costin. *Publisher* Garry Williams. *Subscriptions* Apex House, Oundle Road, Peterborough, PE2 9NP. Tel: 0733 898100. *Colour Origination* Sole Graphics, Kirby Road EC1N. *Typesetting* Pre-Press Ltd. *Distribution* EMAP Frontline, Park House, 117 Park Road, Peterborough, PE1 2TR. *Printing* Severn Valley Press, Caerphilly. © EMAP Images 1991 No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publishers. *This month's cover illustration was produced by Kevin Bullmer, the man behind Ocean's* T2. Extra special ACE Up The Sleeve award goes to all at Pro Print for seeing us right when the chips were down.

*An EMAP Images publication.* Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London. Tel: 071 251 6222. Fax: 071 490 1094.

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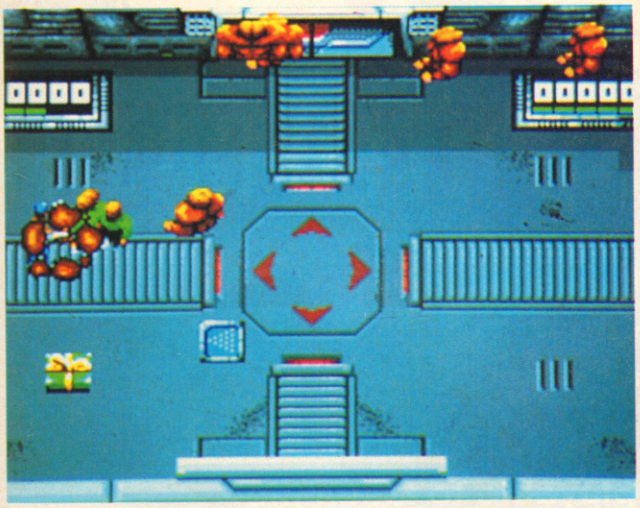
**42** You can rely on our new four-page previews section to keep you up on the newest of the new news now!



**50** ACE Benchmarks. The *finest* games. Is your software collection complete?

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AMAZING NEW 6-PAGE SUPER REVIEWS

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Possibly the most eagerly awaited race game of all time, Lotus II is a significant departure from the blockbuster original. Has Gremlin's new approach paid off?

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**Mig29M Super Fulcrum**
Domark set out to remedy the longevity of Mig 29 with a bigger, bolder and brighter sequel. PC owners should prepare themselves to be impressed.

# SPOT™

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"Gameplay that's fit to bust."
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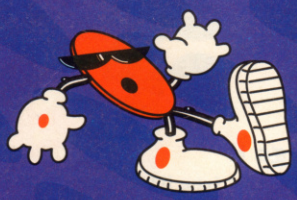
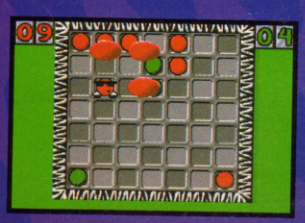
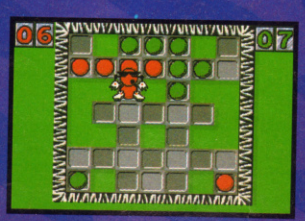


Available on Atari ST, Amiga and C64 disk.

## KEEP YOUR EYE ON SPOT™

Amiga screen shots shown.






Virgin Leisure Genius

# GAMES NEWS

**Rik Haynes, newshound extraordinaire goes to work on this month's top stories.**

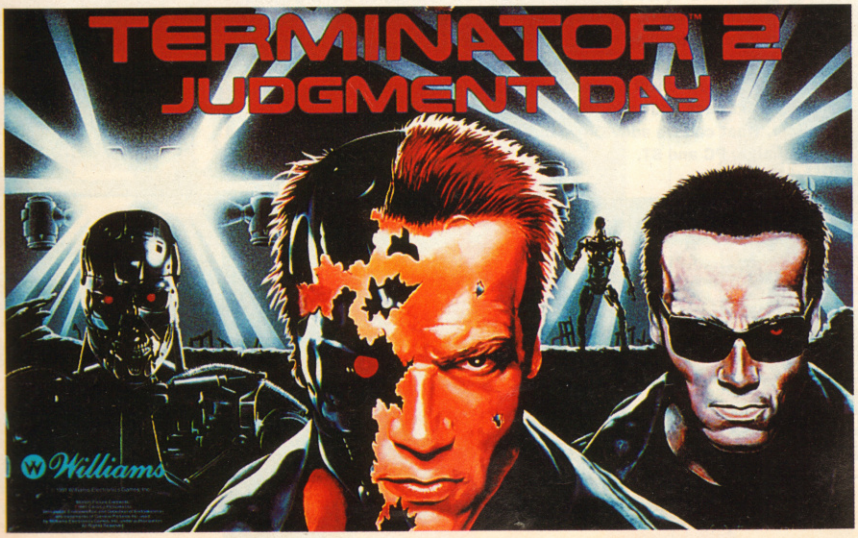
## It's Nothing Personal

Megahit games Lemmings, Eye of the Beholder and Shadow of the Beast are just three of the 77 titles either shipping or under development on the Lynx colour handheld console. Atari is also planning to announce 'big film and coin-op licences' in the near future.

Following a triumphant launch at the AMOA coin-op show in Las Vegas last month, Williams Bally/Midway is readying the European release of a stunning new arcade machine. Based around the hugely successful Terminator 2 movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as the 21st century cyborg killing machine, many believe this to be the best video game ever licensed from a motion picture.

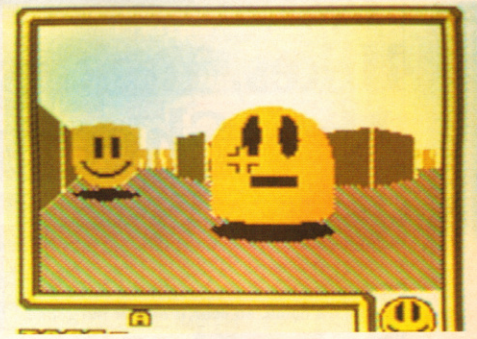
Designed by the same team that brought us Narc and Smash TV, Terminator 2: Judgment Day is a playable and addictive Operation Wolf-style shoot'em-up featuring graphics not only digitised from the movie, but also specially recorded by Williams personnel on the set of the film. No other video game company has ever had this much access to such raw movie materials. Even Arnie got involved in the project!

Next month, ACE will be running an exclusive behind-the-scenes report on the Making of Terminator 2 coin-op. Miss it if you dare...



Faceball 2000: Loads of Smiloids, level after level of dangerous mazes and up to four players... who could ask for anything more?

## Adventures In Cyberscape



What is filled with level after level of treacherous mazes and Smiloids? Bullet-Proof Software, the publisher that made a mint from Tetris and Pipe Dream, is bringing out another arcade puzzle game for the Gameboy.

Faceball 2000, developed by the same people who wrote MIDI MAZE for the Atari ST, gets its name from the maniacal smiley faces representing each player. Like the previous release from James Yee, this is a game of tag where players chase each other through a three-dimensional labyrinth in a race to evade capture. Up to four people can play - using the special Nintendo adaptor - in solo, free-for-all or team competition. Bullet-Proof Software is also planning a version of Faceball 2000 for the Super NES.

Meantime, Soviet game supremo Alexey Pajitnov is now working full-time for Bullet-Proof Software in Redmond, Seattle. The talented Russian-born creator of Tetris used to invent games in his spare time at the Computer Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences where he explored sophisticated computer applications like speech recognition and artificial intelligence.

"When I broke my leg in my early teens, I got very bored reading day after day and I started looking into mathematical puzzles," reveals Pajitnov, "I got so carried away I forgot everything else - school, friends even girls."

# Better Late Than Never

Elite, the cult space game that gathered countless fans after its original release, is set to be launched on the software starved Acorn Archimedes, writes Mathew Tizard.

First released for the BBC micro in 1984, and since converted to almost every other machine, Elite has now been updated and revised by a two-man coding team based in Cheshire. This version of the game sports sampled sounds and solid 3D graphics running at 25 frames per second.

Other innovative new features include ships that flock and cruise in formations of up to 50. Every spacejock is endowed with motivations of their own, intelligently acting on individual politics and seeking out enemies. Items that the original included in the manual as mere whimsy have now actually been implemented, exploiting the raw power of the machine.

Archimedes gamesters have never had it so good. Elite may soon face competition from another 3D epic on its way, Karma has been under development for four years and is more akin to a Virtual Reality life model than a game.

**Elite comes to the Archimedes: can this great game stand the test of time ?**

*Virgin Games has signed up veteran heavy metal band Motorhead. Details regarding game design and format availability of this off-beat deal have yet to be announced. ACE reckon's the infamous Motorhead hits like 'Beer Drinker and Hell Raisers' and 'Deaf Forever' could inspire one monster of a game.*

# On The Starting Line

Gremlin has beaten off tough competition to sign-up British Formula One hero Nigel Mansell. The ink is hardly dry on the contract, but the successful Sheffield-based publisher of Lotus, Switchblade II and Utopia, is confident world championship racing fans will lap this one up.

Although a definite title or release date have yet to be announced, it is known that Gremlin is planning a multi-format release which will probably include the Nintendo Gameboy and Super NES consoles.

Programmer Paul Blyth, who has just completed the PC conversion of Federation of Free Traders, is already working on the Nigel Mansell game.

# Hikes, Tackles And Cheers

**'Iron' Mike Ditka is one of the most famous men in American Football history. He not only distinguished himself on the field but also won the Super Bowl as coach of the Chicago Bears. Now Ballistic has launched a Megadrive cartridge bearing his name, so does it deliver the goods, too?**

**"Mike Ditka Power Football is for gamers who love American Football and want an action-packed game rich in realism, playability, graphics, options and statistics - in that order," boasts Producer Sam Nelson.**

**According to Ballistic, this is the only American Football game for the Megadrive that gives the player total control of their team. Individual parameters can be set for each team, such as the occurrence of fumbles, injuries, fatigue and even penalties. There is also a library of more than 80 different plays to choose from.**

**Memory seems to be no object for Ballistic, Mike Ditka Power Football contains eight megabits of feature-packed code, bitmapped graphics and sampled sounds.**

**Ballistic promises Mike Ditka Power Football has 'more plays, real action and fun than any other football game for the Megadrive'.**

**Cisco Heat reaches the Atari ST, didn't Jaleco do that Big Run driving game as well?**

# The Heat Is On

**Cisco Heat is a real scorcher of a Jaleco coin-op conversion swears those hip dudes at Imageworks.**

**"This is the most thrilling and realistic racing simulation ever to be seen on a home computer," as the Imageworks spokesperson goes into full hypermode, "The race will come alive through intense shock absorber rebounds, fast pace and solid body feel."**

**Well, er, what can we add? Oh yeah, Cisco Heat is coming later this year for the Amiga, PC and ST.**

*Psygnosis and DMA Design, makers of the infuriating Lemmings, are working on a simultaneous four-player exploration game in the first-person perspective tradition of Dungeon Master. Requiring a minimum one megabyte of memory, Hired Guns is a 'blend of old-world mysticism and rugged science fiction'. It also pumps out MIDI-compatible music!*

# Virtual Theatre

Mirrorsoft and newcomers Revolution Software are very excited about the latest graphic adventure game system to be introduced. Is Virtual Theatre a SCUMM-buster, then?

The major attraction with Virtual Theatre games is that they're set up to advance and develop independently of the player. You can just sit back and watch life go by if you're feeling lazy.

User friendly control is another plus point. The mouse-driven interface is intuitive and quick to operate. Standard commands such as 'get knife' can be issued within seconds. Alternatively, players can simply ask other characters to perform actions ranging from the likes of 'tell character to get bottle' to complex requests like 'tell character to go to the guard room and get bottle and then use bottle on tap and then go to the outer cell and then give bottle to the prisoner'. Pretty neat, eh?

Virtual Theatre is the brainchild of Charles Cecil, Tony Warriner and David Sykes at Revolution Software. Adam Tween, Stephen Oades and Paul Docherty have produced the backdrops, sprites and animated graphic sequences for the first Virtual Theatre game. Richard Joseph has composed the music and sound effects. The company is also working with Dave Gibbons, co-writer and artist of the successful comic The Watchman.

Mirrorsoft claims Virtual Theatre is the future of adventure software and is planning to publish a series of games based around this new system. The first release, Lure of the Temptress, will be available next year for the Amiga, PC and ST.

Early screenshots from the first Virtual Theatre game, Lure of the Temptress, the British answer to those humorous graphic adventures from Lucasfilm Games and Sierra On-Line.

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ST DRAGON

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THE ONE 93% (AMIGA)
"The Sales Curve have produced a masterpiece." CU AMIGA (CU SCREENSTAR 90%)
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SWIV

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"A deeply challenging and maddening addictive game to play."
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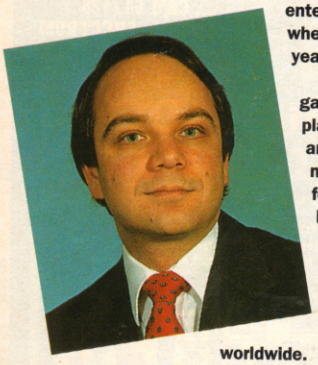
NEWS GAMES NEWS GAMES NEWS

# WHO'S THAT GUY?

**In the first of an occasional series, ACE looks into the careers of creators responsible for truly remarkable games. We thought it would be a great idea to start with Sid Meier, co-founder of Microprose and the brains behind Silent Service, F-15 Strike Eagle and Railroad Tycoon.**

Civilisation is the latest game from award-winning game designer Sid Meier, but why did the master of simulation and strategy software actually start programming games? After graduating from the University of Michigan with a degree in Computer Science in 1976, Meier worked for mini-computer firm General Instruments. His love affair with entertainment software was highlighted when he purchased an Atari 800 eleven years ago.



Sid 'Silent Service' Meier may look like a corporate accountant but he certainly knows his video games, eh readers!

The idea for Meier's first game, Hellcat Ace, came after he played an aerial dogfight at a video arcade. Sid realised he could add more realism with software created for personal computers. A string of hits and accolades followed, in 1986 for instance, Silent Service was named Best Simulation in the USA, Britain, France and West Germany. Overall, Meier's games have sold over two million copies worldwide.

"Gamers want a continuing stream of challenging and interesting decisions to confront," declares Meier, "They like options, 'what if' scenarios and countervailing considerations. People can go to movies for graphics and books for storylines. They look to computers for the interaction and for stories in which they themselves are the main character."

Carry on computing, Sid!

# Dislikes And Desires

**Can you imagine the sort of game Eye of the Beholder 2 will be? US Gold and SSI have taken note of the comments from over 500 dungeon masters in order to produce the sequel to one of the best selling games of 1991. The legend series of games are the first graphically based AD&D fantasy role-playing games to be licensed from TSR.**

Apart from an expanded storyline and more character interaction, The Legend of Darkmoon features a greater variety of creatures and new locations such as forests, temples, catacombs and towers.

True to what has become something of an expected feature of games coming from the USA, Eye of the Beholder 2 uses animated 'movie' sequences throughout. On a more esoteric note, the programmers have soft-wired an improved interface to speed-up spell casting. However, the point-and-click command principle remains.

Lucky PC players equipped with an EGA, Tandy or VGA graphics card will be able to test drive the game next month. A soundboard is optional, but they must have 640K of RAM and a hard drive. Meanwhile, Amiga gamers will have to wait till the New Year before they can start exploring the Legend of Darkmoon. Don't forget to ask Santa for that one megabyte memory expansion or you won't be able to sample the fun and frolics!

# The Big One

**Sources close to Konami are suggesting this leading Japanese video game firm has just made a successful bid to publish the most eagerly-awaited video game sequel of all time... Elite 2!**

**David Braben, co-creator of the first game, has been working on the follow-up to this epic space game for nearly three years. Braben has previously hinted that Elite 2 will incorporate numerous graphical and gameplay improvements, including the facility to actually explore the surface of every planet.**

**Fuelled by intense speculation, the rumour wagon has been going at full pace. For instance, one pundit told us Braben devised Elite 2 primarily for the PC while Konami is likely to insist on Super Famicom and CD-ROM versions, too. Braben could again team up with Ian Bell to help produce these conversions. There is even talk of a specially adapted Elite 2 reaching the arcades. It is not known whether the proposed deal also includes the NES version of the original Elite which Braben developed himself.**

**Konami has recently enjoyed considerable success with the video games based around those Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and home-grown products like Castlevania and Gradius. Publishing Elite 2 would mark a radical departure for the company.**

**Neither Konami or Braben was available for comment as ACE went to press. Watch this space.**

**At one penny under £45, the eight megabits of memory contained in the Shadow of the Beast Megadrive cart certainly don't come cheap.**

# CARTRIDGE CAPERS

**Psygnosis and Electronic Arts are about to launch the first two Megadrive games from their co-publishing agreement.**

**Regarded as one of the most successful Amiga games ever released, Shadow of the Beast is a visually attractive arcade adventure featuring multi-level parallax scrolling of the surrounding fantasy landscape.**

**Fatal Rewind, previously known as The Killing Game Show, is a cross between a shoot'em-up and platform game as the player takes the role of a convict in a futuristic TV quiz show. Shades of The Running Man, perhaps?**

# DRUG BUSTERS

Argonaut Software, the development house behind Starglider 2 and Birds of Prey, has teamed up with Microprose to develop a strategic flight simulation set in the near future.

As Supreme Commander in Advanced Tactical Air Command (ATAC), players are put in control of an elite team of 250 undercover agents and a tactical force of four F-22 fighter bombers, two helicopters and a base secretly located in the jungles of Colombia. The objective is to stop the drug barons before their filthy merchandise hits the streets of all major cities. This isn't easy, though. The five major bosses have enough money to control politicians, the judiciary, hire the most talented mercenaries and buy the best airplanes and missiles.

ATAC is part flight simulation, part strategy game. As you might expect from Argonaut Software, the simulation part of the game features a 'fully-realised 3D world' with hills, mountains, roads, towns, cities and jungle plantations. The game will be released on Amiga, PC and ST in early 1992.

# It's Weird!

Foursfield and Imageworks, creators of the critically-acclaimed Brat, are now tweaking another surreal arcade adventure.

"Suzerain features stunning graphics which have an almost Dali-esque flavour," states a spokesperson for Imageworks, "The planet features a variety of beautiful but very strange landscapes."

Players go on a quest to capture evil wherever they find it. Luckily, they have two faithful assistants and a rather dainty cask to help them out. Discover this overlording experience for yourself when the game is released on the Amiga, PC and ST.

# THE MARK

## THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND™ 2 - LE CHUCK'S REVENGE

The Secret of Monkey Island witnessed the demise of the evil ghost pirate Le Chuck at the hands of young Guybrush, and an agitated bottle of root beer. Guybrush doesn't have long to rest on his laurels however, because blood is thicker than root beer, and Le Chuck's brother is out for revenge.

*Available on:* PC Compatibility: EGA, VGA, MCGA. Requires 640K Ram AT or better recommended. Hard disc recommended. Supports AdLib™ and Roland™ and CMS Gameblaster sound cards.

Screenshot from PC

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Screenshot from PC (VGA)

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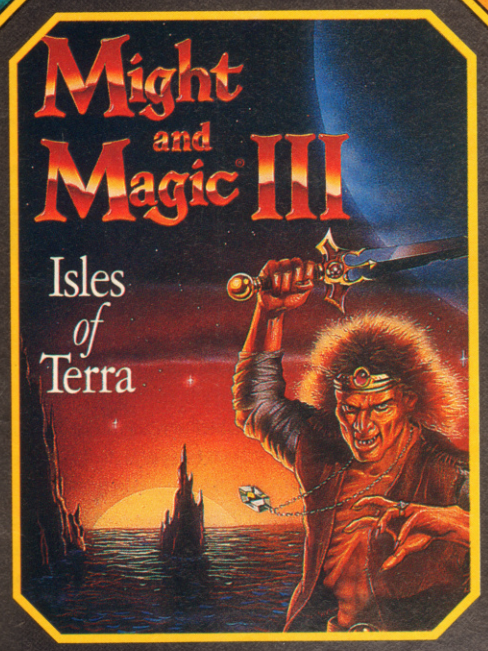


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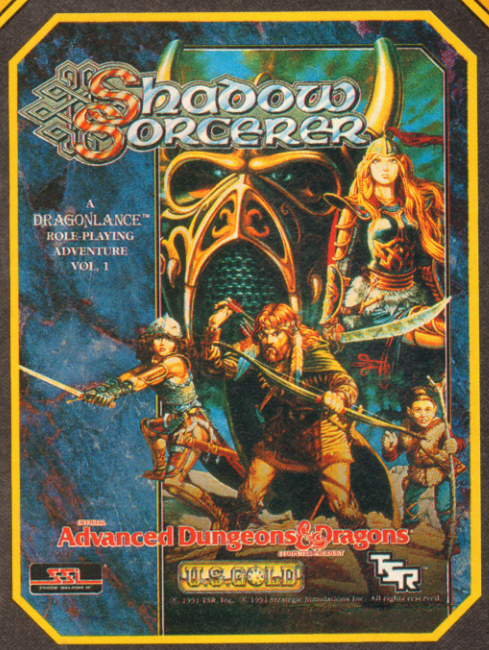


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Screenshot from Atari ST

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Screen shots are only intended to be illustrative of the gameplay and not the screen graphics which vary considerably between different formats in quality and appearance and are subject to the computers specifications.

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# letters

## VIRUS DEATH!

On page 96 of your October issue you mention that the Amiga is subject to viruses. I'd be very much obliged if you would insert a little article about what to do when confronted with one. I am reduced to a state of sweating fear when I receive a message from some bastard in Germany on my monitor.

I bought what is supposed to be an anti-virus disc for ten quid but the instructions are such a lot of gobblygook that I can't make head nor tail of it. Unfortunately I can't remember which of my discs could be the offending article and consequently load up each day with something approaching fear in case I'm messing up all my discs. What puzzles me is that I haven't any phoney discs as I buy them from shops.

Robert Lamb
Cottingham
East Yorkshire

*Prevention's better than cure, and it's not difficult to protect your disks against viruses. If possible, always leave the Write Protect tab ON (which means you can see through it), and that will prevent any gremlins writing themselves onto your disks. However, if you are using a game or application where you need to write onto your disk, this isn't an option. Another foolproof method is to always turn your machine off at the power point for a good thirty seconds before turning it on again to use another piece of software. Many of the more dangerous strains of virus stay in the machine even after a three-key reset. Since you're already infected however, your best bet is to get hold of a good hard virus killer - chances are the commercial one you bought isn't much cop. Most PD libraries stock killers, and currently the best available is Master Virus 2.2, available from Amiganuts. For a couple of quid you can cleanse your collection. So there you go.*

## THE BIGGER THE BETTER

I think your reviews of software are good although some are small. Could you give two pages per review? If you run out of stuff to write you could always fill most of the pages with screenshots. Some games may be brill but we don't see big reviews of the game and just flick past as if it wasn't there. Your ratings are good, except for that horrible chart. How about drawing a chart that looks like a thermometer where you would clearly see how hot (so to speak) it is.

**Wayne Hudson**
**Old Catton**
**Norwich**

*TWO pages per review? How about SIX? Yes, SIX! By now you've probably already seen our amazing new ultra in-depth reviewing system - and given the sophisticated nature of much of today's top software, there's rarely any danger of us running out of things to write. Our "horrible chart" as you so quaintly refer to it is in fact the most accurate and appropriate at-a-glance rating system going - although you'll probably be pleased to see that this month it's been revamped somewhat to make it even more skill.*

## WHITTA MUST DIE!

Having already bought a copy of Wing Commander II, I was truly astonished to read your luke-warm review of it. Did Gary Whitta actually get it out of the box? Or is he deaf, blind and retarded?

It is without doubt the most awesome and brilliant game I have ever played on a home computer, and makes the original Wing Commander look dull and repetitive in comparison.

Your predicted interest curve (PIC) is wholly incorrect. It doesn't reflect the comments which accompanied it. The interest level remains high until the game is completed, then it falls sharply. (It does NOT start declining from the moment you start playing, as suggested by the PIC).

Some of your quibbles with the game are justified, but in spite of these, the game is still far and away better than any other game, so your ACE rating of a mere 800 is completely ridiculous. (The same comments could easily be applied to the excellent Thunderhawk, but that didn't stop you giving it a rave review).

It sounds to me like another case of sour grapes, because even if Wing Commander or Wing Commander II ever gets released for your beloved Amiga it will only be as a pale shadow of the original because of the poor graphics and slow speed of the Amiga.

**Christian S Low**
**Walker**
**Newcastle**

*You sad person. If Wing Commander II is the most awesome game you have ever played, you must have led a pretty sheltered life. While there's no doubt about Wing Commander's technical excellence, the ACE review comments about the quality of the gameplay remain valid - it's little more than a series of short, unrewarding and*

# KONSOLE KOPIES?

ACE, it's come to my attention that more and more computer games are becoming more and more like their console counterparts. As I understand it, Ocean's licenced games of the Simpsons cartoon is simply a port-over from the Nintendo platform game. Now, from looking at your preview of Hudson Hawk last month, it seems as though that game is also very console-y in style, with lots of cute characters and platforms and things. You only have to look at games like Rick Dangerous, Switchblade, Impossamole and many others to see that this is not a new trend.

It's not that I'm complaining. Far from it. Console games are often better than computer ones, so making computer games more like consoles games can't be half bad. What I'm wondering about is why games designers are doing this. It's certainly not to make higher quality games, as we all know that software companies don't give a shove about us kids on the street. They're just interested in their flashy clothes, new cars and tropical holidays. Perhaps it's because, in the light of the new console boom, the softcos want to make their games more easily convertable onto the console formats - for as we all know, that's where the real money is. Or maybe the softcos are worried about consoles killing off computers, and are making their games more console-y in order to make computers look more fun in face of the opposition. Or maybe it's just an effort on the part of those lazy developers to give themselves even less work by stealing tried-and-tested elements from existing console software. Whatever it is, I think the so-called "high-rollers" of this industry ought to buck their ideas up a bit, else they'll find themselves in right shtuck. So ACE, where do you stand on this highly controversial issue?

**Dennis Osbourne**
**Corby**
**Merseyside**

Some good points, Dennis, although some of your reasoning seems a little paranoic to us. Not everyone in the industry is out to mug you and leave you bleeding in the gutter, you know. In the case of Hudson Hawk, the fact that developers Special FX produced not just the 16-bit versions, but NES and GameBoy as well should account for the game's console look and feel. Your theory about making games more viable propositions for console sub-licencing seems the most likely - Core Design's Chuck Rock, which is soon to appear on the Megadrive is a good example. But don't worry your head about it too much - it's unlikely to shake the software industry to its very foundations.

*What do you want first, the good news or the bad news? If you want the bad news first, read the first paragraph first, then the second. If you want the good news first, go straight to the second paragraph.*

*Right. You can't get Oids for the Amiga, which we at ACE consider to be a travesty of global justice, as it's one of the true all-time classics. It was only ever produced for the Atari ST. And we have no idea where you can get a copy of Persian Gulf Inferno, as it's getting on a bit and we can't remember who published it - it didn't get much recognition when it was released. You might want to have a search through your local softshop's bargain bin and see what you can find, though.*

*Hooray! Narc should still be readily available on the shelves as you read this. If you have any trouble finding it, you should have no trouble getting hold of it from Ocean directly. Call 061 832 6633.*

# AND WIDE NOT?

I've just finished reading Gavin Gainsborough's letter on wide-screen computer games (October ACE) and I think it's an excellent idea. The reason I am writing in to suggest that this proposed new format would be especially superb on those new wide-screen cinema-style TVs that I read about a while ago. I think they're already available in Japan, but when are they coming over here? With all that extra space, programmers could make games that would be truly panoramic, not just a "letterbox" screen display. No doubt poncy programmers like the Bitmap Brothers would go ape over this idea, as that's the sort of gimmick they're into. So what about it then, eh?

**Harold Smithers**
**St Ives**
**Cornwall**

We have to agree, Harold, that the prospect of "real" wide-screen computer games is a pretty sexy notion, but it's not much more of pipe dream if you look at it from a practical point of view. For a start it's going to be a very long while before wide-screen TVs are commercially available in this country - in order to take off, the TV companies would have to completely revolutionise the way they film and broadcast their programmes. And can you see that happening? A more realistic prospect (although still not a very likely one) is the idea of wide-screen computer monitors, but even then existing computers would not be able to work with it, as their screen-display hardware is designed only for a standard square image.

*very limited space-combat sequences strung together by a lot of attractive but inconsequential slideshows and animations. Perhaps you'd like to write to us again in three months, when you're sick to death of seeing the same pictures over and over again, and tell us if you still enjoy it. An 800 rating is hardly "mere" - it's a respectable mark. And remember, ACE is a multi-format mag. We don't favour any one machine, and while we have high hopes for the future of the PC as a games machine, we don't think it's going to happen if companies keep dredging out shallow software like Wing Commander. Our review reflected that opinion. If anything it seems to be you that has the problem, as your comments about the Amiga indicate. Slow? Poor graphics? And you call US biased?*

# GORE BLIMEY!

I read with very great interest your feature on gory games last month. I have only had my Amiga for about a year, and so am unfamiliar with many of the games you covered, but I would like to get my hands on a few of them as they sound very good indeed. Can you tell me where I can get copies of Persian Gulf Inferno, Oids and Narc? I would be very appreciative if you could give me some leads.

**Oliver Ironside**
**Chigwell**
**Essex**

It's not possible just to bolt on extra width. So for it to work you're looking for a completely new kind of computer as well as a wide-screen monitor to be invented. It's a bummer we know, but it's just not going to happen. Sorry.

## TOO MANY COOKES?

*Dear ACE, whatever happened to that bald bloke who used to be editor? I used to really like him.*

**Alex Simmings**
**Coventry**

*Steve Cooke left ACE a few months ago, and within a couple of weeks you should see the latest fruit of his not-inconsiderable loins. PC Review is the monthly re-incarnation of ACE's sister mag PC Leisure, and is packed to the brim with IBM games stuff. And it's a lot better than PC Format. Look out for it.*

## LOOKING GOOD?

Dear ACE, I felt I had to write to you and voice my opinions on the state of many computer games magazines today. It's not that they're badly written - most of them are excellent. It's just that they look so horrible. While many of the magazines are just plain awful to look at, others are attractive on the surface but it's still very difficult to find the information you're looking for at a glance. I won't name any names as the designers of these magazines might be offended, but suffice to say that just about every major mag on the market looks like a Jackson Pollock painting when put next to the artistic yet easily-accessible style of ACE. I hope that you don't make things over-complicated with your forthcoming revamp.

Often magazines print text which is almost exactly the same colour as the background it appears on, making it very difficult to read. Others print their reviews over ridiculously-enlarged screenshots or stupid garish designs, and the result just hurts the eyes. Others hide their ratings and comments all over the place, so you're never really sure what you're looking at. It's easy to get lost. Sometimes a review is so badly laid-out that it's like wading through a swamp, trying to find the information you need. So I say a double hurrah for ACE for making things good-looking yet easy to read, and you other magazines - pull your socks up! I did Art in school so I know what I'm talking about.

**Charles Orca**
**Southampton**

*Aw shucks. Our Art Editor Jim Willis is blushing even now. Thanks for the praise Charlie, and we agree wholeheartedly with your comments - it doesn't matter how brilliant and incisive a review is, if it's badly designed the average reader is likely to have trouble getting the information he needs out of it quickly and efficiently. And in the fast-moving world of software today, many gamers don't have time to sit and paw over reviews - they're too busy getting a new high score or talking to their mates about the latest game gossip. Hope you like the redesign - we think the best just got better!*

## BLAZING A TRAIL TO NOWHERE?

Dear ACE, a very worrying fact has recently brought itself to my attention! According to the description on your Screen Test page, Trailblazers are only awarded to games of "outstanding quality". But from what I've seen recently, you've been chucking them about like bars of chocolate!

As I understand it, the ACE Trailblazer is supposed to be far more discerning and difficult to earn than other magazine accolades. But this certainly doesn't seem to be the case when you consider all the games that have earned them in the last few months. Chuck Yeager's Air Combat, Hatris, Choplifter II, EA Hockey, Jimmy White's Whirlwind Smooker, Mega lo Mania, Thunderhawk, Sonic the Hedgehog... the list goes on and on! Hardly appropriate practice for a magazine that goes around saying it's harder to please than all the rest!

Are you just trying to butter up the software companies so that you can get invited to lots of free parties and trips abroad, are you just very naive, and give awards away to any game that comes along with pretty graphics and a big manual? How do you expect us software buyers to make a purchasing decision when you give a Trailblazer to almost every game you review? It's very confusing. Just what is going on?

**Malcolm Hardcastle**
**Ludlow**
**Shropshire**

*Now steady on! It's true, a lot of games have been awarded ACE's highest accolade over the last few months. But it's not because we have lots of them lying around in a box taking up space, and it's certainly not some half-arsed plan to shmooze the software publishers. We're just as stingy with our Trailblazers as we've always been, and the fact that many recent games have been awarded them just reflects how healthy the software scene is at the moment. You should be pleased with so many choice titles on the market to choose from! And though the purpose of our reviews is to help you, we can't hold your hand all the way and TELL you what to buy. We can only tell you what's good and what's bad, and leave you to make up your own minds using that information as a guide. There will always be people who are never happy - if we gave away less Trailblazers you'd probably complain that we're too grouchy!*

## PADDING?!

Dear ACE, I have been an avid reader of your publication ever since thr first issue, and the Letters page has always been one of my favourite sections. But now a rather distressing fact has come to my attention. It seems that the last letter you print is always by some boring old fart who waffles on for almost a whole column of text without actually saying anything of value or interest. Just what is this all about? I find it very difficult to believe that there really are people so boring that they've got nothing better to do with their lives than right meaningless letters. If I didn't know better, I would think that you didn't get enough letters each month, and so you make up the last one just to fill up the space! If you're going to do this, at least make up a letter with some interesting points in it!

Getting back to my original point, I'd just like to re-iterate how annoying it is to read letters where the author waffles on for ages about nothing in particular - especially when you think that he's got a point to make, and then get to the end to find out that he hasn't after all! That really sticks in my craw!

Raymond Onslow
Dundee
Scotland

Goodness gracious us! While we'll try our best not to be offended at the accusations you've made, we can assure you that ALL of our letters are absolutely genuine. And if we did make our letters up, we'd make them a damn sight more interesting than your pitiful little missive.

## WRITE TO US

**Come on! We know you've got opinions! Let's hear them! Write to ACE Letters, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU. And remember - there's a software prize for the star letter each month!**

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# ALIEN 3

**In space, they may not be able to hear you scream, but they can hear you cry - for a sequel. Science Fiction fans around the world are preparing themselves for a third weird and wonderful cinematic treat. And while 20th Century Fox are putting the final touches on the movie, Probe Software are feverishly working on a brace of conversions for home machines...**

umours about the content of the new Alien movie have been flying around for months now. Talk of mysterious space cows and Ripley murdering Aliens with hand axes has caused much consternation among the moviegoing public. No-one has been really sure just what on earth the new film is going to be about. Until now.

Alien 3 opens with Ripley crash-landing on a remote hostile planet in an escape capsule. Quite why she's crashed, no-one knows. There she discovers a small colony of prisoners, overseen by an even smaller group of guards, who are repaying their debt to society by mining local ore.

The colony is a far from glamorous place. As run by The Company, it is now all but run down. Rife with disease and utterly disgusting, the prisoners have all had to have their heads shaved in order to abate the virulent head-louse epidemic which plagues them. It's this 'look' which spawned all the space-monk rumours.

So Ripley prepares herself for a brief spell on the grim planet until a ship can get her back to civilisation. But no sooner has Ripley had her own locks shorn off than she gets her big surprise. Somehow an Alien has made it down onto the planet with her, and is busying itself by offing the prisoners and cocooning them. If it's successful, all the good work done by destroying the LV426 at the end of the second movie will be for nothing.

Since the colony is run largely by prisoners, Ripley's attempts to combat the xenomorph are hampered by the 'safety precaution' of having no firearms in the colony. Somehow Ripley must rally both prisoners and guards alike and destroy the Alien threat before it kills them.

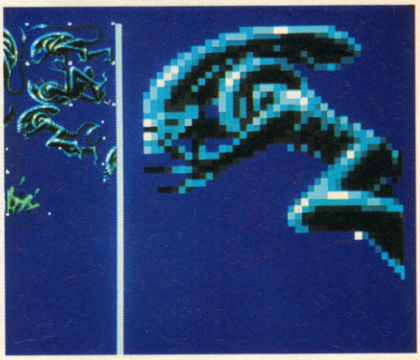
It all sounds most cosmic. "But how," you may very well ask yourselves, "could you make a game out of it?" Good question...

## The Game

Croydon-based Probe Software were the lucky development team that received the call from Mirrorsoft offering them the license. The contract called for a version of the movie tie-in to be produced for all major formats. So, with tight deadlines looming, Probe decided to develop the game primarily on the Megadrive, and convert all subsequent versions from that.

While the code is still in the early stages of development, the game's storyboard has been finalised and it's clear that players concerned about the lack of gun-toting action in the film need not fear. Tony Beckwith from Mirrorsoft: "Yes. There aren't any

*Our hero. Ripley, flight officer 1st class in a none-too healthy hypersleep scenario. If only she knew what awaited her on the mysterious mining planet, she'd wish she could stay asleep...forever!*

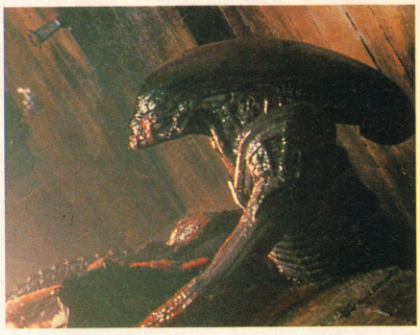


firearms in the movie itself, but we've managed to get permission from 20th Century Fox to use all the hardware, etc, from the first two films. We've got flamethrowers, grenades and pulse rifles in there. It's going to be pretty action packed".

The basic premise of the game is simple. Parallax-scrolling levels of the planet will form the backdrops to a constant stream of high-action gameplay. Each of the main eight stages of the movie is represented by graphical changes in the game. Ripley must move through the colony, rescuing prisoners who have been coccooned by Aliens and destroying the insectoids wandering around. At the end of each stage a Mother Alien must be defeated before Ripley can move on to the next. Failure to defeat the Alien will leave the prisoners vulnerable to attack.

Apparently Fox were most helpful to Mirrorsoft even while the movie was in production. Beckwith again: "We were given access to the movie sets and had a good look at all the aliens too. We took the graphic artists down there and spent a lot of time just getting the details right. There's no doubt that the game will have the right feel."

A further hazard which players must deal with is the presence of the face huggers. These little varmints



*The movie seems to borrow some visual leaders from The Thing as well as the others in the series. The aliens themselves come in all shapes and sizes, but they are all hellbent on doing away with the innocent colonists.*

*Probe's programmers were given access to the sets when the movie was being shot at Pinewood studios to enable the feel of the film to come through in the game. In fact, the above picture shows Fergus McGovern out of Probe software inspecting one of the sets himself. (Except it doesn't)*

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*Witness Mirrorsoft's amazing new line up of product. Ride those hills in Cisco Heat and save the environment while kicking in the bad guys in Turtles. Hurrah!*

## AND SOME OTHER THINGS!

***Mirrorsoft, busy people that they are, have another two simply enormous titles up their chimneys for Christmas.***

**Cisco Heat is a crazy cop-car racing game for two players. Take the role of a San Fansisco cop on his day off and duel with fellow officers for the title of best driver in the city. Plenty of thrills and spill here, we're sure.**

**The Turtles coin-op has way surpassed everyone's expectations, both in coin-gobbling performance and quality. Shortly, players will be able to enjoy the thrills of controlling the green greats in a home version of the game.**

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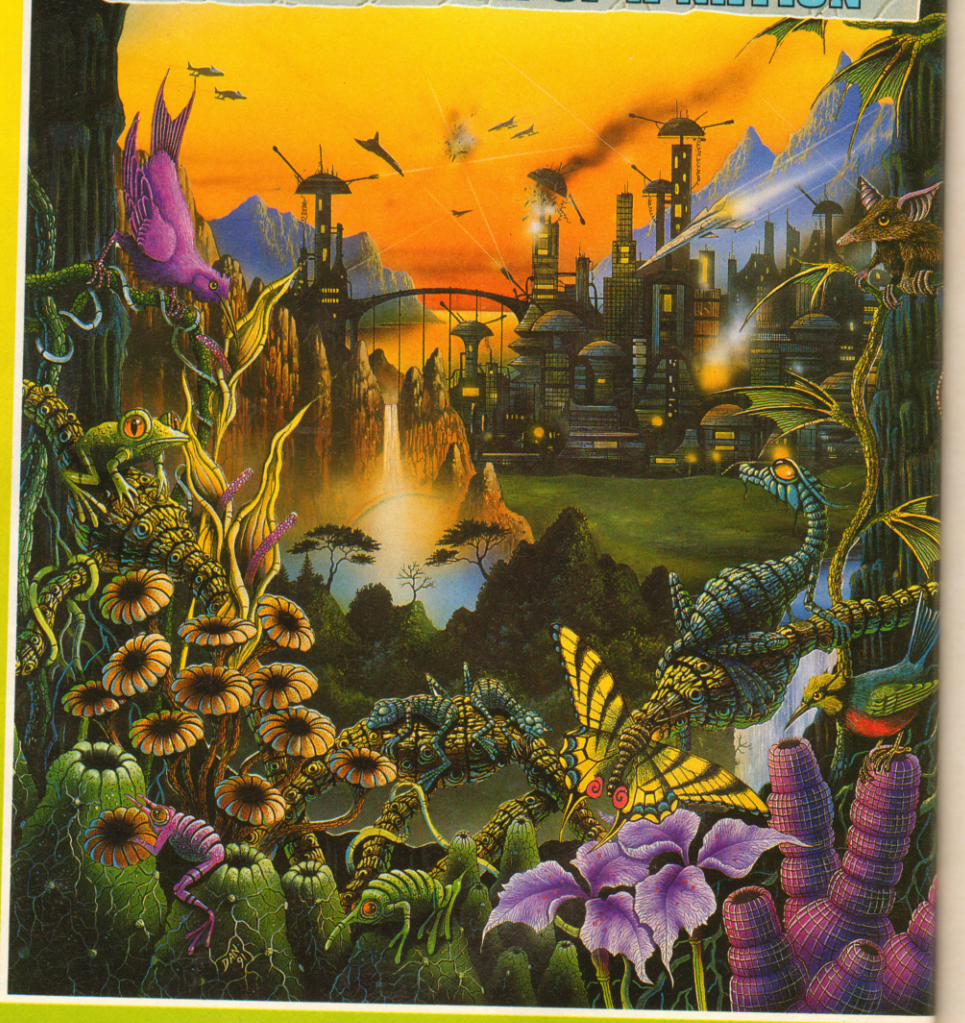
Screen shots from various formats.

# UTOPIA

## THE CREATION OF A NATION



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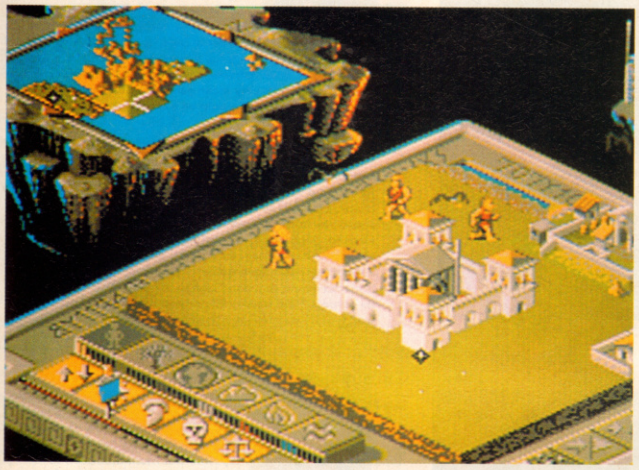
in the Works

# live.....

# JUDGEMENT DAY!



**For the first time ever, on a wet and windy day in September, Bullfrog threw open its doors and revealed the secrets behind the creation of Populous II to a hand-picked quintet of lucky ACE readers. And very impressed they were too...**

**Dateline:** Wednesday, 11th September, 1991.
**Location:** Bullfrog Productions HQ, Guildford, Surrey.
**Mission:** Populous II.

It's eleven a.m. and Peter Molyneux is a worried man. Today is the first time that his latest creation and Bullfrog's most eagerly-awaited game to date will be seen by members of the general public. And not just any old members of the general public. The five people who will soon be arriving to look at Populous II are the hardest, most demanding and most intelligent breed of games player - ACE readers. They've been hand-picked from hundreds of entrants to take part in ACE's first In The Works Live event, and they're not taking any crap.

If truth be told, Molyneux's got little to worry about. The long-awaited sequel to the 1989 classic that put Bullfrog on the map is already shaping up to be the 'God'-game to beat them all. But no product is perfect, and that's where the five ACErs come in: after they've learned how the game was created, they'll get to play the game into the ground (or at least as much is possible in a single day) and report their findings back to Molyneux - what they like, what they don't like, what features they think should go into the game, which ones should go or be altered.

It's a process that Peter and his cronies are particularly used and receptive to, having organised regular weekend playtesting sessions for all their previous games. Bullfrog has always stood by its conviction that no matter how far a game is in its development it will be shelved or even scrapped if it's not well received by the playtesters.

Such ideology has led to several products falling by the development wayside in the past - and while it's fair to say that a product as prestigious as Populous II is unlikely to be killed on a playtester's say-so at this late stage, Molyneux is more than willing to listen to suggestions and make changes. With many of the game's features and effects still to be finalised before its release at the end of the year, there's plenty of scope for enhancement. As an added incentive to come up with good suggestions, Bullfrog has promised that anyone whose idea is implemented in the final game will receive a design credit. With that in mind, the quintet of ACErs buckle down and get to work...

Robert Mills gets the upper hand against's ACE's David Upchurch in this two-player game. But considering he's got Bullfroggers Glenn Corpes and Kevin Donkin in his corner, it's hardly surprising...

### THE GAME

The idea behind Populous II, according to its creator Peter Molyneux, has always been to improve upon the first game, while retaining the same gameplay formula that made the original a classic. To this

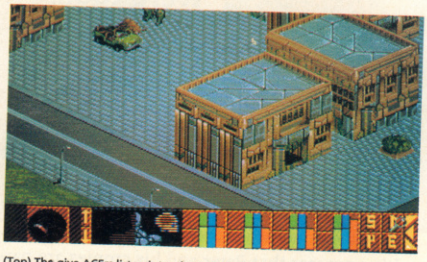
# in the Works live

"Come with me if you want to play Populous II." Yes, Peter Molyneux IS The Terminator. Well, not exactly, we just thought it would be quite funny if he dressed up like one because they happened to have the relevant props in the office at the time. Sorry...

end, the scenario and basic premise remains the same - two all-powerful deities play a universal power game over a series of primitive worlds, with the populations of entire planets as pawns. But while Populous II was pretty ambiguous so far as story was concerned, the sequel is much more of a themed affair, being strongly based on classic Greek mythology.

The introduction of such a theme has paved the way for a whole new world of gameplay elements and godly effects which makes Populous II an altogether more involved - and hopefully longer-lasting - affair. "One of the major problems we encountered with the original Populous," says Molyneux, "Is that most people played about a hundred worlds easily, and then suddenly the game just got far too hard and they got fed up. So what we've done with Populous II is to grade the difficulty a lot more carefully."

It's all done by way of an RPG-type element - the player starts off as a very weak demi-deity, whose wrath is only a little more terrifying than someone bursting a crisp packet. The objective, like the first, is to increase your power by accumulating manna (faith) from your followers, which in turn is achieved by keeping them happy - giving them places to live,



(Top) The give ACErs listen intently to Peter Molyneux's Populous II presentation. With the aid of this latest version of the game, Molyneux explains the game and discusses the techniques involved in creating it.

(Above) As well as Populous II, the ACE guests were also treated to sneak glimpses of the PowerMonger World War I Edition (see Previews) and this little beauty, entitled Bob. Also known as Higher Functions, it's an isometric arcade adventure thingy currently being produced by Sean Cooper of Flood fame. ACErs were also privy to exclusive info on Flood 2 and a couple of other projects so secret we can't even talk about them. Not bad eh?

allowing them to procreate, creating attractive scenery and so on. Now, however, there's a lot more emphasis on the accumulation of manna, as it not only increases your ability to perform godly effects, it makes the effects themselves more powerful, and grants access to new, more devastating effects as your following increases.

While the original Populous only allowed the player to perform a handful of godly phenomena, the

## LET'S GET CRITICAL!

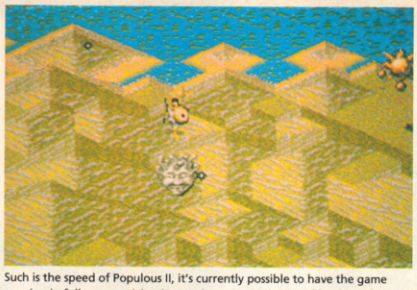
**One thing's for sure - Michael Squires is having a good time. Either that or he's taken the ACE photographer's instructions to "look like you're having a good time" a little too seriously. Of the five ACErs, the 16-year-old from East Ham was a bit of an odd-one-out as - would you believe - he'd never played Populous before! However, his lack of 'God'-game experience proved helpful, allowing him to evaluate the game from a 'fresh' perspective. And considering his novice status, he played a very mean game indeed, pounding his computer opponent to a pulp on a couple of occasions.**

**19-year-old Chris Harris from Bexley in Kent was one of the quieter conferencers throughout the early part of the day, but towards the end of the playtesting session he came up with one of the best ideas for Populous II, suggesting a system similar to that of Mega lo Mania's, where a small test box appears when the cursor is placed over a command icon to explain its purpose. That idea's still under consideration and could well find its way into the finished product.**

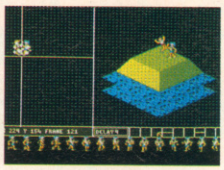
**By far the most outspoken participant of the day proved to be confirmed Populous addict Robert Mills - perhaps its something to do with his 25 years giving him lots of worldly experience. Whatever, the likely lad from High Wycome was more than keen to contribute. Initially, he was a little worried that Bullfrog might have done TOO much with Populous II, swamping the game with too many new features. But after the practical playing several games against ACE's David Upchurch (and winning), he came to agree that Bullfrog has got the formula just about right.**

**The expression says it all - 24-year-old Michael Donovan (who lives just around the corner from Bullfrog's offices in Guildford) was more than impressed by Populous II. Although initially there was some debate over whether the graphics were too dull and moody, Michael said he thought the game looked "a lot better than the first". He was also suitably taken aback by the way effects can be combined to create hybrids.**

**For the oriental perspective, who better to turn to than 22-year-old Kenneth Lin from Earley in Reading. After all, the original Populous is one of the biggest successes of all time with our sushi-eating friends. And though Kenneth proved to be one of the quieter participants, he admitted that he enjoyed the game, making a point about the cursor control being a tad fiddly. Molyneux accepted the point and that too is now being looked at.**

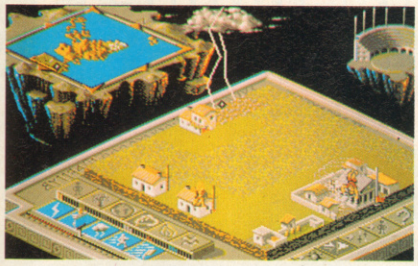


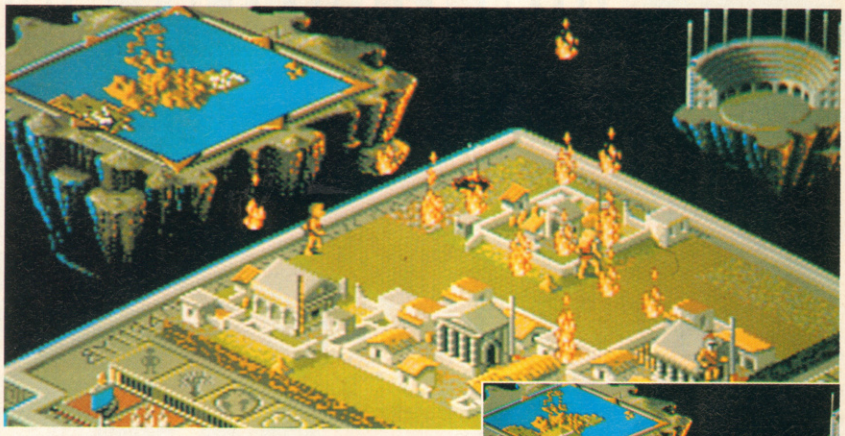
Such is the speed of Populous II, it's currently possible to have the game running in full-screen, giving impressive panoramic views like this. Of course, it's a little tricky when it comes to selecting icons...



(Far Left) Michael Donovan and David Upchurch both contemplate thorny Populous II problems. The computer intelligence has been refined since the first game, and it shows.

(Left)Populous II's realtime graphic development system means that as soon as the graphic artist has created a sprite, it can immediately be transferred into the game to see how well it works in practice. Such technical wizardry has allowed the game to go from conception to virtual completion in an incredible three months!





sequel features literally dozens of awesome effects, including thunderstorms, whirlwinds, pillars of fire, tidal waves, plagues, and new improved versions of the old favourites earthquake (which now acts like a fault line, tearing a land mass apart), volcano (complete with rivers of lava) and Armageddon.

Some of the more interesting effects include baptismal fonts - little ponds which transform the enemy's followers into your own and vice versa, and a new version of the original game's knights, which involves sending down famous heroes from Greek mythology, such as Mars God of War, who rampages around killing everybody, and Aphrodite Goddess of Love, who attracts men to her and leads them to their doom like lemmings.

In addition, the whole of Populous II's land management system is much more sophisticated - land is raised and lowered as before, but it's now possible to create entire cities by laying roads, planting trees and building castle walls to protect your people from attack. But should push come to shove, your people can equip themselves with weapons and fight to the death.

An original new element gives the player the ability to create his deity RPG-style by answering a questionnaire prior to the action. As well as selecting to be good or evil, it's possible to specialise in certain kinds of effect and even change the deity's visual appearance! By playing with different types of god the game can be altered drastically, and matching contrasting opponents in a two-player game can produce some very interesting results.

As you read this, Bullfrog is playing around with various gameplay ideas and doing some general polishing. It's due out on ST and Amiga by the end of the year, with a PC version following in 1992. Watch out for the ACE review soon...

(Top) Fire rains down in one of Populous II's more elaborate - and devastating -godly effects. Equally as impressive is the fire column which spins around like a burning whirlwind, roasting anything it touches.

(Above) Music man Allister Brimble gave a sound demonstration of how Populous II's music and FX were created using some bizarre sample sources. The roaring fires in the game actually came from rustling a crisp packet. When he's not been working on Populous II, Allister's been doing the sound for Team 17's Alien Breed (reviewed on pages 76-81), using his mum for the sampled speech. What a lad.

(Above Centre) Professional as ever, Peter Molyneux expertly fields a question from an inquisitive ACEr.

(Above right) The enhanced Volcano effect in Populous II features realistically-flowing lava. Any unfortunate walkers that cross its path are turned into molten carbon - as this shot demonstrates.

## NEXT TIME IT COULD BE YOU!

**We hope to organise more In The Works Live events on a fairly regular basis, with the next to be held sometime within the next few months, with special guest stars The Bitmap Brothers. They'll be opening their doors to another handful of lucky ACErs and unveiling their latest yummy offering, The Chaos Engine. You'll meet the Bros, learn how the game, its graphics and sound were created, get an exclusive first play of the game and even have the chance to put forward your own comments and suggestions. Just think, you could be an honorary Bitmap Brother!**

**We're hoping that this next event will be even bigger and more successful, so if you'd like to take part, all you have to do is send your details to us, including your NAME and ADDRESS along with your AGE (16 years and over only, we're afraid) and TELEPHONE NUMBER. Also, let us know if there are any development teams or games in development that you're particularly interested in seeing. Send the details to: In The Works Live!, ACE Magazine, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU.**

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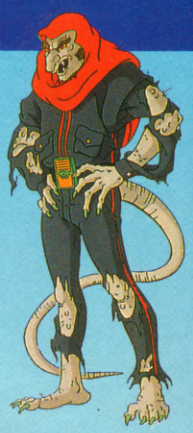

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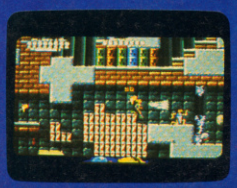

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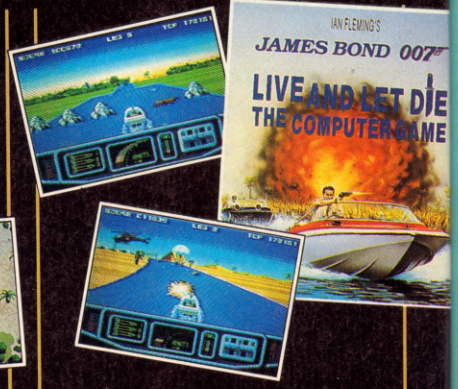
## LIVE AND LET DIE




• M's briefing was simple, "Find Mr Big, and don't come back until you do." Q has given you his latest toy – the fastest and most dangerous speedboat ever made.
"Good luck 007 – you'll need it."

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# In the Works

Welcome to the place where things get done. Welcome to the pages where you can see games crafted and formed and moulded into living things. Welcome, you lucky fellows, to the In The Works pages. Distinct from an In The Works live, an In The Works shows the games which are so secret that if the software companies had their way, wouldn't be on show at all. Well, okay, actually we get a lot of help from the publishers and the programmers of the games and they run around like crazy answering our stupid questions and putting together all manner of maps and sprite mock-ups when they could be doing other things, but we wouldn't sound half as big, hard, clever or grown up if we were to admit that, would we? This month, we visit America to report on the goings on in the land of Paragon Software and get some of their views on games development. Core Design also display their wares in the form of Heimdall, a graphic marvel that can best be described as Dragon's Lair with playability. And finally, Teque, the team behind Domark's forthcoming Pitfighter cordially invite your good selves to inspect their scaling and sizing routines. An offer no-one could refuse.

30 .....Heimdall
From the people who haven't quite brought you Littil Divil yet. Will you just *look* at those graphics?!

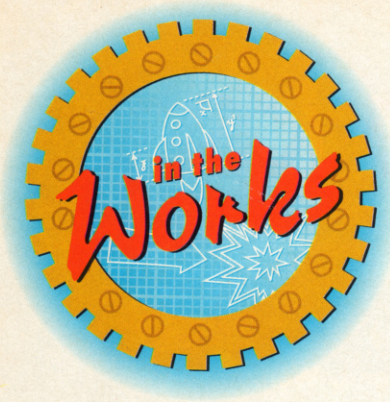
34 .....Paragon
Rovin' Dave "Upchurch" has a hard life. This month he's been all the way to America to visit Paragon.

38 .....Pitfighter
How's the allegedly impossible conversion coming along for Teque?


Heimdall

Paragon

Pitfighter




# HEIMDALL

**Could CORE's Vikings goin' hikin' romp be the arcade adventure to top them all? ACE ponders that question and takes a look.**

There's a mood at Core often lacking at other software companies - confidence. Although a young company, Core's games (Corporation, Chuck Rock, Thunderhawk) often far outshine many of the releases from their larger, more venerable competitors.

And as purveyed by affable Core supremo Jeremy Smith, this mood of confidence certainly isn't a quiet one. He's enthusiastic about his products (generally rightly so), and he lets you know it. I first saw Heimdall way back in the Spring, and even then there were clear indications that it could be the game to really catapult Core to stardom.

Heimdall can't get a good navigator to join his crew then journey times from island to island can increase by half! And Ragnarok is approaching fast.

## THE FIRST TRIAL

Heimdall's elders, being the bushy-bearded ale-quaffing Vikings that they are, have decided to take the decidedly under-age boy down to the local tavern. A few foaming jars later and the lad's well sozzled - not the best time to let him have a go at the old Norse game of 'Lock choppy'.

The principle is simple if horrific. The player has to free a little girl from the stocks by throwing axes

Heimdall isn't easy to categorise. Depending on how you look at it, it's 'Dragon's Lair but with playability', or 'an animated arcade adventure', or simply 'an RPG'. In reality, it's a blend of all three.

The plot centres around the Norse legend of Ragnarok, the Apocalyptic battle between the Gods of Good and Evil that will decide the fate of the Universe. However Good's previously excellent chances of winning have been severely reduced by the theft of three magic items from Valhalla, namely Thor's Hammer, Odin's Sword and Freyr's Spear. The villain responsible is the twisted Loki, evil brother of Thor, who has hidden the items in various locations on the islands that make up the Norse world.

The ethereal Gods cannot appear in the physical world, and so must send Heimdall, guardian of the rainbow bridge that joins Valhalla with the world, to earth in the form of an all-too-mortal baby. Heimdall's aims are clear - he must grow to manhood, gather a crew of sailors and set out on a quest to find the stolen artifacts.

*(Above) A couple of examples of the exquisite isometric-3D graphics in Heimdall. The player's group of three explorers is represented on-screen by just one character, though the player can change between them at will. Thankfully for the lone trekker the whole party participates should combat arise.*

*(Far right) The already notorious axe-throwing sub-game. Miscalculate an aim and hit the little girl and the consequences are terrible - especially for her!It's likely that the current gory end-sequence will be changed for the final game.*

## THE THREE TRIALS OF HEIMDALL

As Heimdall grows from a young boy to a man, he must attempt three arcade-style tests. These are not just for light relief - Heimdall's success in each test increases the number of possible candidates for his longboat crew. This can be pretty disastrous - if

to cut the tethered plaits of hair holding her captive. The axes are aimed using a joystick-guided crosshair. It all sounds simple enough, but Heimdall's beer-guzzling has induced a distinct trembling in his throwing hand. At the moment the consequences of a bad aim are graphic in every sense of the word - the girl's head splits open like the proverbial ripe tomato and gore sprays everywhere.

Although the general response from those who have seen the game in early demo form is that this gory end should be kept in the final game, Core feel that its probably a little too strong to be put before Little Johnny, 5. And so a tamed down version is on the cards, with the girl simply moving her head at the last moment to avoid the blow. Buyers of Fangoria will be disappointed.

### THE SECOND TRIAL

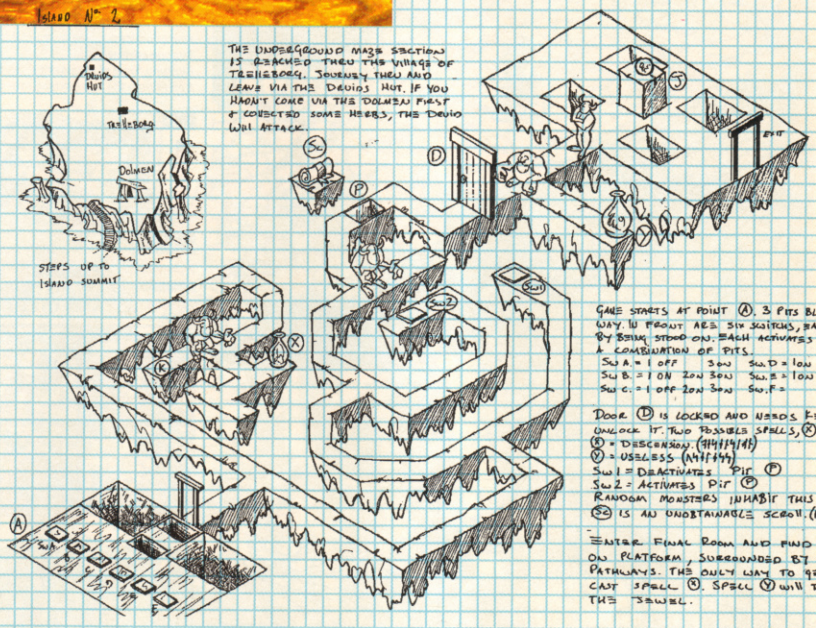
An older but not much wiser Heimdall must face the challenge of the greased pig. Under the bemused and amused gaze of his peers, the plucky lad has to chase the swerving swine around a muddy farmyard, ducking and diving in an attempt to bring the beast to ground. Inevitably there's much mud spilled.

### THE THIRD TRIAL

Now a pubescent young man, Heimdall faces his first test of true beefiness. On a longboat packed to the mast with berserker swordsmen, a similarly-armed Heimdall has to fend off all-comers.

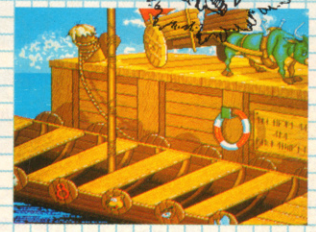
### THE QUEST BEGINS...

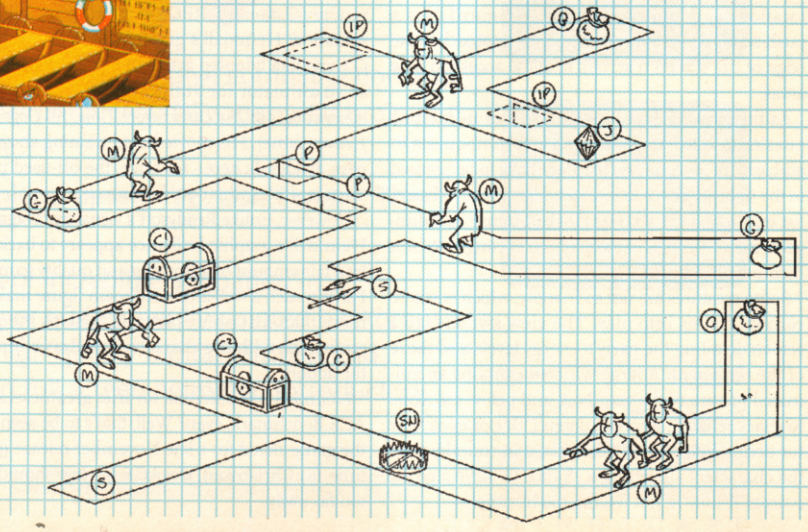
Having selected a crew of six from the coves available, Heimdall's adventures really begin. By moving a sword-point cursor over a map of the 'world', the player moves from island to island. Once arrived at an island, the player can choose three of his crew to join him on his exploration of the island, and skill is required to select the right people. Each crewman

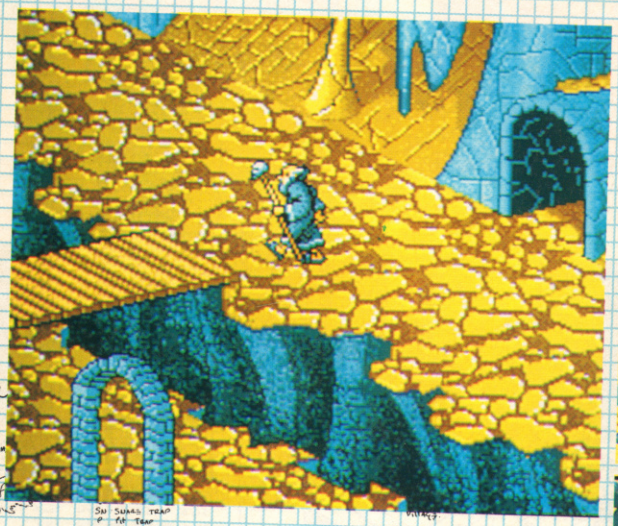


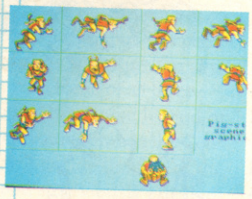
SMALL ISLAND WITH MARSHY PASSAGES ON IT.

(S) START POINT
(C1) TREASURE CHEST (UNTRAPPED)
(C2) TREASURE CHEST (TRAPPED)
(SW) SWAMP TRAP
(M) MONSTERS.
(G) GOLD
(S) SPEAR TRAP
(J) JEWEL
(IP) INVISIBLE PIT.
(P) PIT.

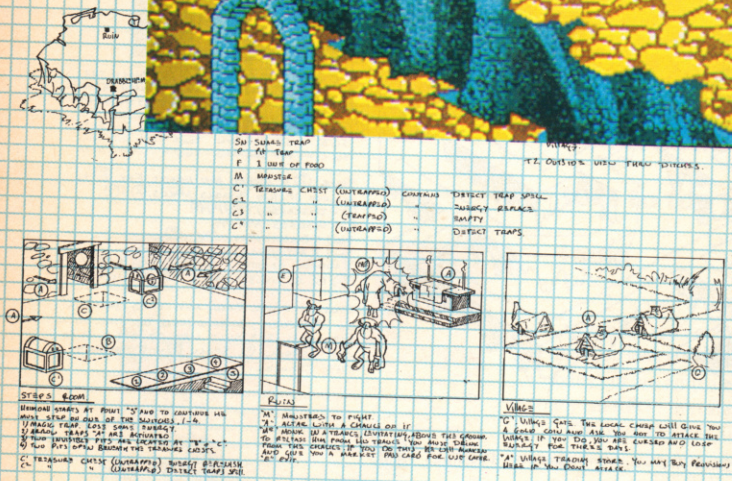








(Below top) The combat screen has been designed to be incredibly simple to use. Combat takes place in turns - the player simply selects the action he wants to perform from the list provided.
(Below middle) Just a fraction of the animation frames used to breathe life into this one adversary.
(Bottom) Some of Heimdall's animation frames from the hog catching mini-game.



# GET YOUR UGLY FIZZOG IN HEIMDALL!

**As we're sure you will agree, Heimdall now looks like a right stormer of a game and no mistake. And how would you - yes, YOU! - like the chance to actually appear in a quality software publication? Very much? Very much indeed? We somehow thought so.**

**Well now we're pleased, in association with Core Design, to present the ACE and Core Design Get Your Face Into Heimdall Competition.**

**Since the game is still in development, ACE readers quick enough to answer the questions below and send their entries in will be judged in our contest. The winner will then have his or her picture (a required part of the entry bits and bobs) digitised and transformed by one of the team's artists into one of Heimdall's crew! Just imagine, if you will, the honour and prestige of fighting side by side with Heimdall! Not bad, eh?**

**Consider next, if you possibly could, the thought of owning your very own Heimdall Axe, a lovingly created and thoroughly beautiful piece of craftsmanship, hewn out of the very steel (or some other metal) found only in that sports trophy maker's shop round the back of Core's office.**

**These are the prizes on offer, and you could have them all! So answer the questions and send your entries, complete with a photo of yourself to: ACE Magazine, Heimdall Competition, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU.**

**The BIG Question:**

**Heimdall isn't the only Core game to star an axe-wielding hero. Name the hero and the game.**

***Rules:***

***All entries must reach the ACE office by the 20th November. The Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. We can't return any of your pictures although we do promise to have a laugh at them.***

has different RPG-style abilities, and knowing when and where to use them is one of the keys to success. It's a case of Norses for courses.

Each of the islands is depicted in beautiful isometric-3D. Unlike Cadaver's system, where each location is a room-sized chunk, Heimdall uses a push-scrolling system. As the player approaches the edge of the screen it scrolls to allow access to new areas.

As the player explores, he'll discover numerous puzzles to solve, traps to avoid and mini-quests to embark on. Switches on the floor have to be pressed in the right sequence to form a bridge across a chasm, for example. Or a strange cloaked figure in a dungeon may require a certain item be brought to him before he'll aid you.

Some creatures are not so friendly, which is where combat comes into play. The view switches to a screen detailing the party's energy levels and those of the opponent. A large window contains an animated picture of the assailant, and below are icons to attack, change weapon, defend, flee or even pray for divine help. Battle takes place in rounds, with the characters all getting a chance to 'have a go' or scarper if they're not feeling too healthy.

## SOWAZNU?

On paper Heimdall doesn't sound like it offers anything truly new. And, to be honest, in a lot of ways it doesn't.

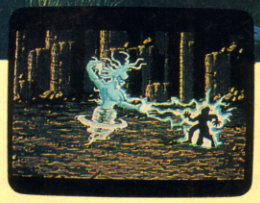
But what sets Heimdall apart from the other also-ran 'revolutionary' RPGs is its truly amazing presentation. Heimdall's graphics were drawn by Jerr O'Carroll, a talented artist who previously worked as an animator for Sullivan-Bluth studios (of *An American Tail, The Land Before Time, All Dogs Go To Heaven* fame). His movie-based training shows and pays dividends here - for once, the oft-used phrase 'cartoon-like animation' holds true.

However, unlike Readysoft's visual extravaganza's, Heimdall's graphic brilliance appears to backed up by a fair amount of absorbing and quality gameplay. Having such a well-animated main figure makes for more than just pretty pictures, it helps the player empathise with the character and draws him into the action.

Heimdall has potential for true greatness. A new ACE Benchmark, even? Well, that's to be seen. With the game slated for a late November release (just in time for Christmas), the ACE Review shouldn't be too far away.

# MOONSTONE

## A HARD DAQS KNIGHT



## SO MUCH FUN -YOU'LL DIE!

Moonstone - a remarkable combination of fast, aggressive combat action and subtle role-play set in a fantasy world, that uniquely challenges your brain and your reflexes - while covering you in gore.

Oh, by the way, if the sight of so much blood upsets you, don't worry. The blood is an option!

Moonstone features nearly 1,000 frames of incredible animation in 2 Megabytes of monsters and creatures, over 60 beautifully painted backdrops and detailed scenery. Sound effects are high quality digital samples and includes a full musical score and stunning full screen animated introductory and game complete sequences.

12

*Moonstone contains scenes of strong graphic imagery with particular realism. Although these scenes are optional, this product is voluntarily rated 12. Parental Guidance is recommended for younger players, however this is not a legal requirement.*

*©1991 Mindscape International Limited. All rights reserved. Moonstone is a trademark of Mindscape International Limited. Written by Rob Anderson.*

MINDSCAPE

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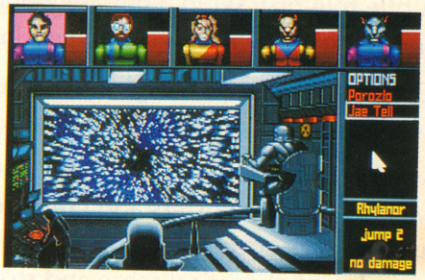
In the Works

How does a company go from custom accountancy programs to state-of-the-art RPGs? ACE went Stateside to find out...

# THE PARAGON W

Mention "Pittsburgh", and most Americans will think of "steel". The Pennsylvanian city was a major part of America's industrial heartland, famed for its foundries and steelworks. But those days of glory are just a fading memory now - the recession of the 80s has brought about the rapid decline of America's steel industry. But it's not all gloom and doom. Springing up in their place are small companies specialising in state-of-the-art high-technology.

Which (tenuous link) is the business of Paragon Software, creators of MegaTraveller. Let's face it, you don't get much more high-tech than laser carbines, portable plasma guns and Jump-2 starships. The team are based in Greensburg, which lies a short distance south of Pittsburgh. It's almost David Lynch-like in its epitome of small-town America - all that's missing are a woman carrying a log and a dwarf speaking backwards.




*(Above) The Paragon people. That's Mark Seremet in the centre wearing the black T-shirt, with F.J. Lennon standing third from right.*

*(Right top) Space 1889: Attack! The party prepare to fight. It's a shame really that there's no-one around to thump...*

*(Right) MegaTraveller 2: With a thundering boom, the player's ship blasts into Hyperspace. Hold on to your potatoes.*

## THEIR HISTORY

Paragon Software started life in October 1985 as Customized Software Systems. The company was formed by Mark Seremet to provide custom accounting software for local businesses. In May 1986 F.J. Lennon joined and together they decided to turn the company away from business software and towards games. "It wasn't really any heavy business decision", comments Mark. "We just thought 'Hey, that sounds like fun'".

In July 1987 Paragon Software launched its first game, Master Ninja: Shadow Warrior of Death on the IBM PC, an unashamed clone of the Karate Champ coin-op, of which both Mark and F.J. were great fans. A string of titles followed.

In April 1989 Dr Doom's Revenge appeared, the first fruit of a licensing deal with Marvel Comics. Other Marvel tie-ins included X-Men: Madness in Murderworld; The Punisher (no relation to The Edge's UK interpretation); and The Amazing Spiderman.

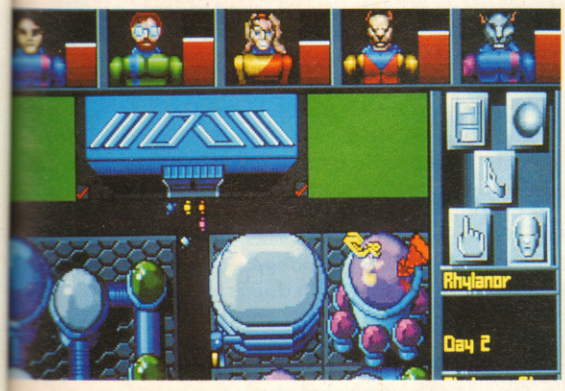
In May 1990 Paragon released MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy, the result of a new licensing deal with Game Designers' Workshop (GDW), one of the oldest and most respected tabletop RPG companies in the US. Marc Miller, GDW's boss and designer of the original Traveller, provided a lot of help to Paragon. "He's got some great ideas on game design," says Mark. "He really knows his stuff. When we were developing MegaTraveller we got a lot of feedback from him but it was always positive."

## SPACE 1889

Space 1889 appeared almost a year ago in the US. The game is set in a Victorian Era world where space travel is possible thanks to Thomas Edison's invention of steam-driven spaceships, which play their trade between Earth and the colonies on Mars and Venus.

The player is cast in the role of a adventurer leading a party of five similarly-inclined coves through thick and thin to a bizarre encounter beyond the Asteroid Field. Based on the Game Designers' Workshop's RPG of the same name, it bears many

# N VIEW




*When looking down on the city the player can zoom in or out to three magnification scales.*

similarities in setting, game design and user interface to Origin's *Martian Dreams*, but is far less fiddly - there's no need to mess about with doing things like dressing your characters. "I know that some people like that sort of intricacy," says F.J. "But I don't think it's that many."

## MEGATRAVELLER 2: QUEST FOR THE ANCIENTS

MegaTraveller 2 appeared a couple of months ago in the States, and it's interesting to observe the enhancements made on Space 1889's engine. The most obvious is the introduction of gorgeous 256-colour MCGA graphics, but there are other more subtle improvements.

MegaTraveller 2 marks the first appearance of the Paragon's unique 'PAL' system. This overcomes the annoying feature of many RPGs where you have to keep changing leader to use a certain person's abilities. Instead, characters volunteer themselves for the job in hand if they have the best ability. The player can then decide whether or not to accept.

In sheer size the game is a huge progression for Paragon. The player can visit 117 planets, and there are up to 9 cities on each. In MegaTraveller, each world is described from the Unique World Profile (UWP), which details such things as the percentage of the planet covered by water, the atmosphere type and so on. Rather than store each planet's map individually (which would take up far too much memory), they're generated at runtime from a routine which uses the UWP as a 'seed'.

Unlike Space 1889, the main plot is a looser: "While Space 1889 is pretty linear, MegaTraveller 2 is more open-ended, with around thirty ways of completing the game." There are many mini-plots to get involved in, some of which are very bizarre. "One has you visiting this world where everyone is crazy," explains Mark. "It's their custom. You've got to be real careful not to get killed." F.J. adds, "When you've got this big a game, it can't all be serious and intense. You've got to lighten up occasionally."

### MILESTONES IN COMPUTER GAMING

Paragon are firm believers in what they call 'milestones' in their RPGs. "Milestones are mini-rewards along the way," explains F.J. "They're heavily graphical and musical, and they're supposed to encourage the player and keep him going. The idea is that when you've accomplished a goal these milestones appear and make you feel good and ready to tackle the next stage of the game."

## TWILIGHT 2000

Twilight 2000 is the third of GDW's RPG systems to be converted to the home computer by Paragon. It's set, as the cliché has it, 'the day after tomorrow' in a world devastated by a vicious nuclear war. The game centres around Poland, where two newly-formed powers vie for domination in this devastated landscape. One is controlled by the evil Baron Czarny, the other, unsurprisingly, is controlled by you.

The game is effectively split into three stages. In the first stage, which is the most 'standard' RPG-like, the player acts as a co-ordinator, deploying teams of four post-Apocalyptic survivors from a pool of twenty to do various missions and thus acquire various pieces of equipment and vehicles.

All the action is viewed from an attractive *Cadaver*-like three-quarters angle. Unless man-to-man combat breaks out, the team is represented on-screen by one character - the 'scout'. This scout can be freely guided around the screen, with the game window scrolling to keep up with his movement. Should the scout go behind a building the walls disappear so that he can still be followed.

To speed movement, the player can cut to an overhead map and send the team to various locations by simply clicking on where they have to go. Using an enhancement of a technique first seen in MegaTraveller 2, the buildings have been colour-coded so that the player can tell at a glance which buildings are which. Explains Mark, "We thought about this after play-testing the game for a while and found it a little hard to get about."

*Twilight 2000 is a fascinating and highly unique mixture of RPG and 3D strategy/action elements.*

Twilight 2000 employs an advanced version of the PAL system. As in MegaTraveller 2, members of the team will offer their services if they're the best for the task in hand, but they'll also also make intelligent decisions on their own if needs be. For example, if they're feeling hungry then they scavenge for food - they won't just sit around and starve. In addition, morale is taken into account: "If people are getting killed then members of the organisation may start to leave."

Occasionally the player may discover or be rewarded with a land vehicle. Given the current state of the world, these are highly valuable, and range from jeeps to tanks. A player can guide his team into a vehicle, in which case the screen switches to a 3D polygon-generated view. One of the tricky elements of the project has been passing the data for the positions of the houses, trees and so on between the '*Cadaver*-view' parts of the program and the 3D-polygon parts.

After thirteen game weeks the second stage commences which has a more strategy-orientated tone. The player has to try and occupy towns and city and really start 'empire building'. At the same time, Baron Czarny is doing the same. Eventually a war between the player and Baron Czarny breaks, starting twenty-six game weeks after the start of play.

This third and final stage is depicted almost totally in 3D polygons. The player can send units into battle and direct them personally. Alternatively he

*This shot is from an early demo of Mantis created for last summer's CES in Chicago. The picture started life as a digitised shot of Paragon's demo room. It was then touched up by a graphic artist and turned into a futuristic control room. This combination of digitisation and painting will be seen a lot in Mantis.*

*This was intended to be the base commander briefing the Mantis pilots. "In real life he's a local golf pro," explain Mark. "The symbol on his cap is the club badge." But this idea of close-up animated faces synchronised with digitised speech has been scrapped. Explains Mark: "Linking vocals to the graphics is a bear of a task. Facial movement is so subtle that it eats up huge amounts of memory. To do it properly you'd need at least 2Mb of on-board memory, so now we're only synchronising speech with people talking in the distance."*

can switch in 'cinema' mode and sit back and watch the action as his troops direct themselves, fighting to the best of their abilities. The computer intelligently chooses the most interesting camera views and switches between them as the action progresses. It's all part of Paragon's philosophy of allowing the player to modify the game mechanics so that he can make it as complex or as simple as he requires.

Twilight 2000 is very near to completion, and should be ready for review next month.

## MANTIS

Mantis has only been in development for three months, but it's already shaping up to be Paragon's best game yet. It's a huge 3D space adventure which puts the player in the role of one of Earth's best starpilots battling the Sirians. Individually the cockroach-like aliens have little intelligence, but together they link up telepathically to form a super-intelligent hive-mind.

If the basic plot sounds a little familiar, it's not surprising. Not only was the premise used in Orson Scott Card's novel *Ender's Game*, but it was also the background to Glynn William's game *Warhead*, released a couple of years ago on the Activision label.

Mark explains the strong similarities: "Jacqui Lyons [who acts as agent for both Glynn Williams and Paragon] sent us a copy of *Warhead*. And although the game was good for its time, it's now outdated in a lot of ways. But we liked the plot and the idea of these 'roach-like aliens that are stupid independently but together form a mind, and we wanted to take the ideas and rework them. So we licensed Glynn's ideas via Jacqui."

The only part of the game working so far is the introduction, which is very *Wing Commander*-like in its combining of animated graphics, music and speech. "We decided early on that we wanted a game that was really big in terms of sound and graphics,' says Mark.

This 4-minute long intro alone uses up 2.5Mb of memory, with the final game anticipated to be 12Mb big. But Mark is adamant that owners will only need 640K of on-board memory to run the whole game, speech and all. "This is directly opposite to Origin, who say you have to X amount of memory to run their games. Also you'll be able to deny installation of certain parts of the game depending on how much hard drive space you have available. For instance you could opt to leave out the digitised speech."

Of the game itself, Mark states: "It's a mixture of 3D polygons and bitmapped images, basically because of smoothness. *Wing Commander*'s 3D bitmaps are very nice but we didn't like the way that at certain angles you got 'wobbling'. Also we didn't want to go into direct competition with Origin's game."

Mantis is due for release in the States towards the end of the year, and should appear in Britain soon after on the Empire label. Keep watching the skies for the full ACE review.

**CURRENT RELEASES** This month Space 1889 and MegaTraveller 2 are released on the Empire Strategy label. For the reviews turn to the Reviews Directory starting on page 99.

### FILM FACT

Pittsburgh is probably best known to British readers as the hometown of the luscious Alex in the chart toppin', foot stompin', brain numbin' movie *Flashdance*. As played by the luminescently beautiful Jennifer Beals, Alex is a welder by day and an 'exotic' dancer by night who dreams of going legit and joining a ballet school. Suffice to say she does, as well as getting the man of her dreams into the bargain. Nausea, eh? What a feeling.

## THE FUTURE...

Paragon see no end to the MegaTraveller series for some time. "There's so much background material and information we haven't touched," says F.J.

MegaTraveller 3: The Unknown Worlds is already on the drawing board. "MegaTraveller 3 will enhance and expand on the MegaTraveller 2 engine," explains F.J. Fifteen-hundred new worlds to explore are planned, and there will be three main plots to get involved in. The space combat will be radically expanded so that the player has a greater degree of control over the action, and there will be more *Wing Commander*-style interludes.

Given Twilight 2000's successful mix of RPG and 3D action, what are the chances of a similar approach to a MegaTraveller game? "It's likely that MegaTraveller 4 will include a 3D element," says F.J. "I think you'll be definitely be seeing a lot more 3D in our RPGs in the future."

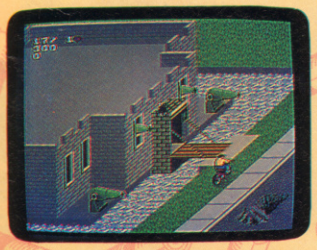
*This unfortunate TV newsreader is one of the victims of the parasitic aliens. "Originally we were going to have the intro look as if the player were in a classroom being told all this background history, but then we decided on this more video-like style," adds Mark. "It has shock value. You watch it, see this bug appear and say 'What the Hell is that?!' It helps draw you into the plot."*

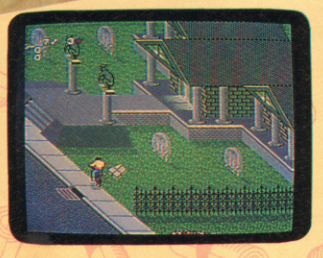
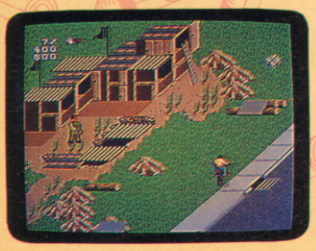
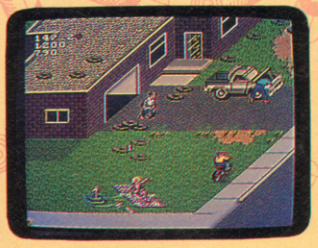
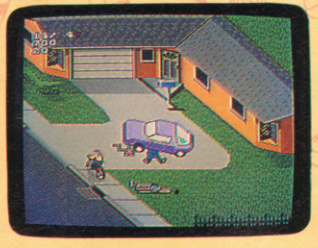
*A fully-grown Sirian, which bears an uncanny resemblance to a Terran cockroach.*

## Look out - he's back!

# PAPERBOY 2

**No window is safe. No fence is too high. The paperboy is determined to deliver the paper to his subscribers any way he can. Tossing papers left and right, riding in three directions, jumping anything, this free-wheeling carrier visits more neighbourhoods and houses, faces more targets and obstacles, in more vivid colours than ever before.**
**Plus, rad stunt riding and BMX tracks in bonus rounds. Choose to ride as either Paperboy or Papergirl too!**



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**And in the red corner... DOMARK's Great White Hope for Xmas Numero Uno... Laydees en' Gennilmain... Pitfighter!!!**

# PITFIGHTER

Come on, how many times have you settled down at your computer for a healthy round of thumpin' and kickin', but had to wade through some rubbishy scenario about rescuing your girlfriend from Mr Large (oo-er!). Refreshingly, Pitfighter doesn't faff about with all that 'plot' malarkey. It's a straightforward underground fist-fight for the only thing that really matters - hard cash.

Domark gave the job of converting the hugely-successful Atari coin-op to Teque London, the guys previously responsible for the Amiga and ST conversions of Tengen's Badlands. As anyone who's seen the coin-op will testify, it's a pretty unenviable task. The arcade machine boasts 256-colour digitised graphics and specialist hardware to shrink and scale the sprites and backgrounds so that the viewer's 'camera' can follow the fighting action. And the good news is that, hard though it may be to believe, the home conversions are shaping up to be almost identical.

The game is the result of eight months' hard slog by Teque's Peter Jefferies. Surprisingly, given the high quality of the conversion, it's the first major game Pete's ever written. Previously he's worked on business software on the Sinclair QL (ah, memories) and small pieces of coding on the Amiga and PC.

"Without doubt the hardest aspect of Pitfighter was the scaling of the sprites and the screen," comment Pete. "At first, I didn't think I'd be able to

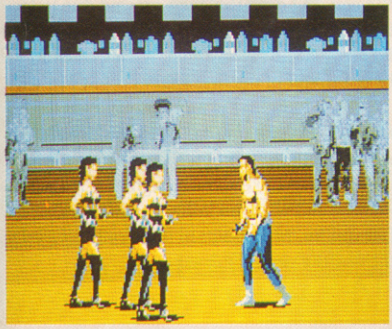
above Ouch! Buzz is on the floor getting a right kicking from The Executioner, while Ty tries to impress Angel with his new dance routine. As the players move about the arena, the view window pans and zooms in and out to keep both fighters in view at all times.

The grudge match takes place every third round, and is a straight face-off between the two players. Learning your partners fancy moves is essential, because the fourth grudge match is a knock-out contest. Only one can go on to battle the Ultimate Warrior.

Thwack! Ty gets it in the neck from Southside Jim. Buzz, meanwhile, occupies himself with his Mad Miles' groin area. Oh, those guys! The crates can be picked up and lobbed. Also lying around and waiting to be used are knives, shurikens and even motorbikes!

### WHAT A DIFFERENCE EIGHT MONTHS MAKE?

This is a shot from an early demo that Pete knocked together from scratch in just under a month. But even then it exhibited many of the coin-ops scaling and panning features. "It was done the quick and dirty way," says Pete. " None of the sprites are compressed, for example. It was a simple demo, with no combat moves in it. Essentially, it was just a test to see how fast things would go."



**SPRITE FANTASTIC** Some of the animation frames for Ty, Angel and the dreaded Ultimate Warrior.

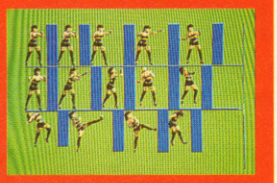
Probably one of the most daunting aspects of the Pitfighter coin-op is its sheer memory-heavy size. Comments Pete: "The original coin-op graphics took up around 4-5Mb of memory, which somehow I had to squeeze into a half-meg Amiga."

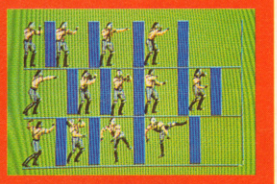
"Pitfighter has a greater variety of combat moves than any other beat-'em-up. Each character has around 100 frames of animation and between 40-50 combat moves," boasts Dean. "The moves are 'context sensitive'. If you do a kick move when your opponents standing then you may do a roundhouse kick, but if you do the same when your opponents on the floor then you might try and stomp on his head. It's likely that the player will have to play for several hours before he sees certain moves."

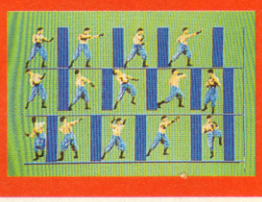
"There are no frames of animation or combat moves missing," stresses Dean. "Making sure that everything was in there was our most important objective. Even the scaling was secondary to that. The moves are what makes Pitfighter Pitfighter. In fact, we've actually got more frames of animation in our game than the arcade machine."

Hang on! How did you manage that? "Let me explain," says Pete. "Are you ready for the techy bit?" Oh yes. "Okay. There are some moves stored in the coin-op's ROM but never displayed. Basically, each character has a punch range and a kick range. The coin-op check's to see if a player is within punch range and if he is then he's punched. If not, the coin-op goes on to do the same for the character's kick range. But because some character's punch ranges are greater than their kick ranges, you never get to see the kick move."

Dean adds, "If you watch the coin-op you'll see that Mad Miles never kicks, though we've altered that so he does in ours."







achieve it but in the end it worked out well." Dean Lester, Teque's head, adds: "The scaling wasn't in the Domark brief. Nobody thought it could be done. When they saw it they loved it, they were very pleased. Having that sense of depth is essential, the game looks very flat without it. It sets Pitfighter apart from other beat-'em-ups."

The sprites are all stored as 64 x 64 pixel 16-colour sprites. As they move about the screen, Pete's 3D modeller keeps a track of how far 'back' the sprite is. They are then distorted vertically so that they appear at an appropriate height for their distance 'into' the background. The width of the sprites never change, but because the sprites are much taller than they are wide the changes in width are negligible anyway, so there's no noticeable distortion. A similar technique is used to scale the crowd sprites and the backgrounds.

Naturally, given the power of the coin-op, there have had to be some compromises. The three-player option had to go, mainly because having six massive sprites walking about screen would slow things down too much and also because it's impossible to squeeze more animation frames into memory. In

Don't get too close to the crowd. They don't like cowards who look like they're trying to sneak off and will force you back into the ring at the point of a knife.

### NOT WANTED: ONE GRAPHIC ARTIST

Unusually, the Pitfighter conversion has no credited graphic artist, basically because one wasn't needed. "We managed to get graphics from three sources: Atari; Tengen [who are working on the MegaDrive version]; and directly from the coin-op," explains Dean. "Unfortunately they were all formatted in different ways. Some had been rescaled, some had been recoloured. We just used any parts from all three that we could. Richard Brown, Domark's project manager, did do a little work processing and rescaling work on them on them."

the coin-op the floor is made up of floorboards that are shrunk and enlarged by the hardware, but in the conversion colour bands are used to achieve a similar effect.

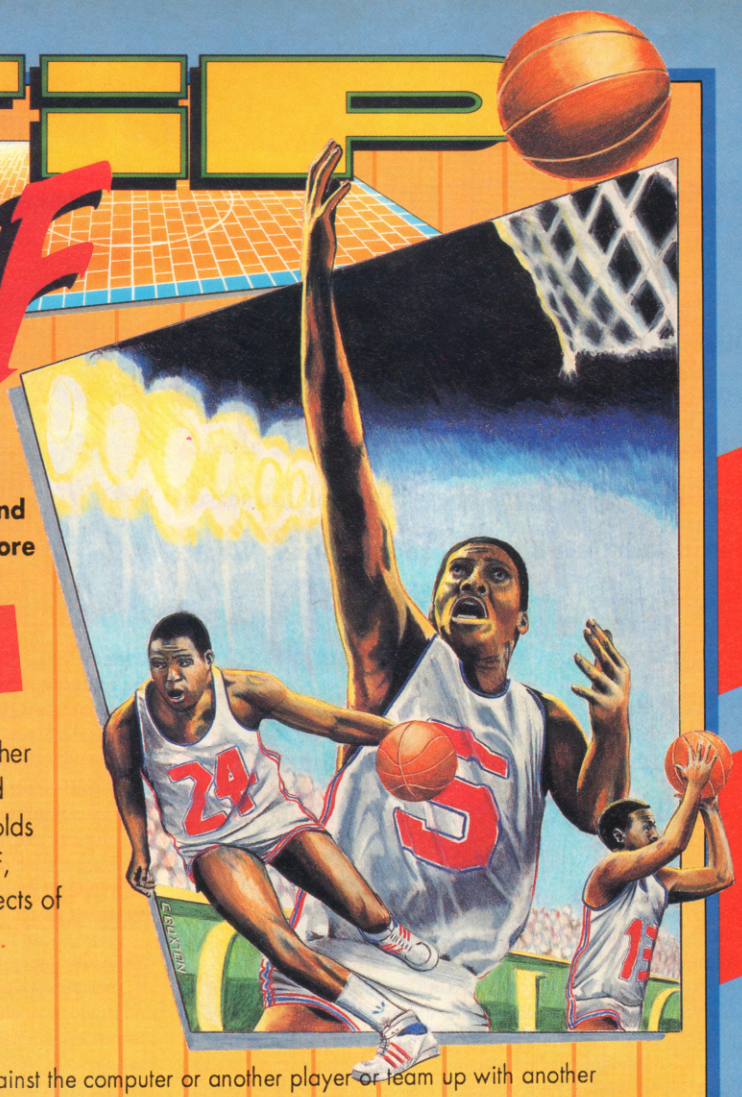
On the other hand, Pete has made several changes for the better: "I've improved the accuracy when the player's picking up objects. Also, opponents will learn if you're using one type of move too much and block it." Dean chips in: "Also, the coin-op ends when you've defeated the Ultimate Warrior, which is a bit crap when you've just forked out £25 for a game. Our conversion loops back to the beginning but harder."

So, what are the chances of Pitfighter 2? "We'll have to wait and see," replies Dean. "I guess it all depends on how well this game is received. We could make the Amiga version run in a frame using some of the tricks we've learned. We couldn't do it this time around due to lack of time. I admit I've got some plans but at the moment I'd prefer not to say anything. What it certainly won't be is a rip-off of the first one."

"I think Pitfighter is more playable on the home machines than the coin-op," concludes Dean. "Because it's not quite so fast and cluttered it's not as confusing. What I like about Pitfighter is it's not just a joystick mangler, you know, not just a case of how fast you hit the fire button. I'm really pleased with the way the game's turned out."

**ST vs AMIGA** Inevitably there are speed differences between the two 16-bit versions. Thanks to the Amiga's blitter the game updates every two frames, with the ST version update hovering around four to five frames. To help keep up the speed the ST game doesn't shift the background about quite as much as in the Amiga game, but it's unlikely players will notice.

# TIP OFF



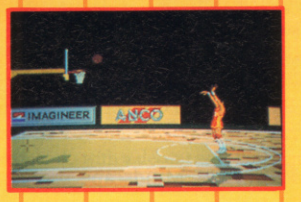
**The sheer pace of the game, end to end action and tactical game play is the core of TIP OFF, a basketball simulation -**

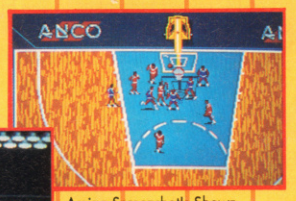
**A SIMULATION WHICH IS GREAT FUN TO PLAY**

Players' skills, attributes and fitness together with the astute substitution of players and change of tactics banks by the coach, holds the key to success in basket ball. TIP OFF, therefore includes some managerial aspects of the game. The main features are:-

* Multi directional scrolling screen
* Five skill levels. Skill level of both teams can be set independently.
* 1 to 4 players option. Option to play against the computer or another player or team up with another player against the computer or another player or two players.
* Facility to practice skills and tactics.
* Facility to create a team at all skill levels and design tactics.
* Instinctive Joystick controls to dribble, pass, shoot or do a dummy. There are two running speeds, two types of dribbling and passing and five types of shots at the basket (Jump shot, Hook shot, Skyhook, Running Jump shot and Slam Dunk).
* Each player on the court is an individual with a unique mixture of attributes (Age, Height, Flair, Pace, Stamina and Composure) and skills (Passing, Dribbling, Stealing, Shooting and Jumping).
* Two types of Leagues. Action Replay at 3 speeds.
* Extra moves are available using two independent button joysticks using the EXORLENCE System.

AMIGA ATARI ST -
IBM PC & COMPATIBLES
**PRICE - £25.99**



Amiga Screenshot's Shown

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**EASY TO PLAY - HARD TO MASTER**

Published by

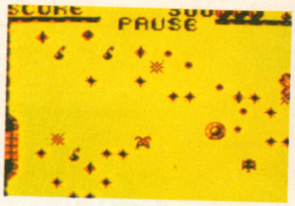
ANCO Software Ltd

8 Millside Industrial Estate, Lawson Road, Dartford, Kent, DA1 5BH Tel: 0322 292513/8 Fax: 0322 293422

Well, what do you know? We just get Summer out of the way, and before you can even hang up your bermuda shorts for another year Christmas is just around the corner again. And nobody knows that better than the software companies, who are already grinding into top gear in readiness to assault the season of goodwill with their biggest, baddest games. What's more, many forward-thinking softcos are already lining up titles to take us into next Spring and beyond! As of this month, ACE Previews will be dedicated to giving you concise and informative lowdowns on the most exciting games coming your way. So let's get on with it...

## CRYSTAL QUEST Data East

There aren't many Macintosh games you can call classics - but Crystal Quest is definitely one of the exalted few. Now, the game that used to be the primary source of lost work hours here at ACE Towers is making its debut on the GameBoy, courtesy of Data East. Admittedly it doesn't sound exciting on paper - guide your little spaceship around 99 static levels collecting crystals and avoiding the marauding baddies. In practice though, it's compulsive like you wouldn't believe. Around here, at least, the prospect of such a conversion has been met with a mixed reaction, as the original game's speed-sensitive mouse control (the most crucial aspect) is unlikely to translate well to the GameBoy's eight-way joypad. But who knows, we may all be completely wrong, and Crystal Quest could well turn out to be a brilliant adaptation of its Macintosh daddy - and you can believe no-one wants to see that happen more than us. Expect Crystal Quest to arrive via import from the USA before the end of the year.

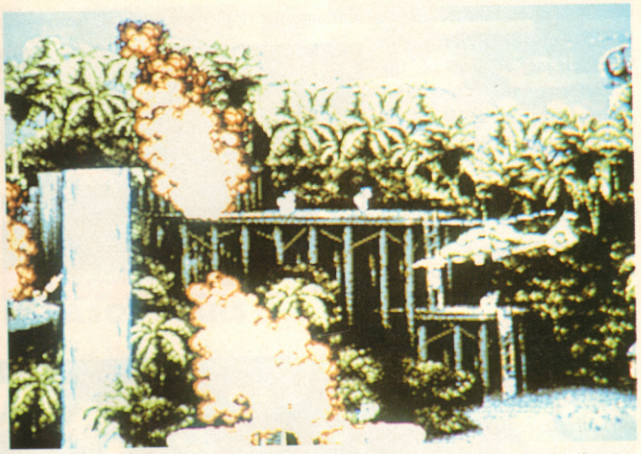



## STRIKE COMMANDER Mindscape

If you're the sort of PC owner who likes to see his machine pushed to the limit, the latest product to cross the Atlantic from Origin promises to send your jaw a-dropping like never before. The brainchild of *Wing Commander* creator Chris Roberts, it uses the same high-end 3D technology employed in the successful space series and brings them down to Earth. The result, it must be said, is some of the most impressive and realistic flight-sim terrain ever seen, comprising spectacular snow-capped mountain ranges and accurate shorelines complete with beaches and surf! Set in the early part of the next century where huge companies, not governments, run countries, Strike Commander casts you as a mercenary fighter pilot who must complete missions in a variety of state-of-the-art aircraft. Strike Commander also represents another step in Origin's quest to produce cinematic software, incorporating an incredible animated opening sequence and even film-style credits on the packaging. The box office opens at the end of the year, so give this one a headline mention on your letter to Santa.

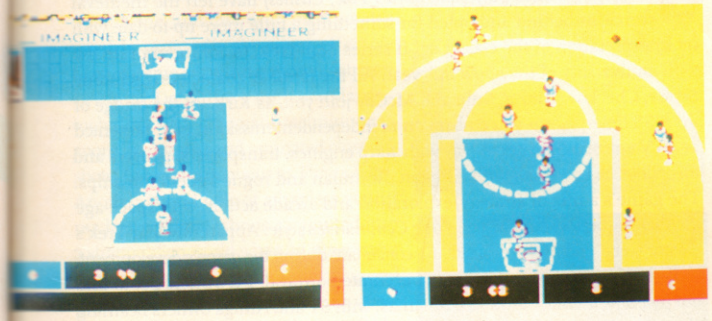
## POWERMONGER: THE WORLD WAR I EDITION Electronic Arts

The ultimate experience continues. The first data disk for Bullfrog's strategy meisterwork promises to take the player into the blood-stained trenches and muddy battlefields of the war to end all wars. It's played out as a series of independent campaigns across a map of Europe, with you as an Allied commander starting out in Northen Scotland and battling the Bosche across various European fronts. Forget bows - now your brave Tommys are armed with machine guns, while artillery support comes in the form of ultra-powerful tanks that blow away everything in their path, and biplanes that provide the only transport across water (and do a nice line in Lewis-gun troop-strafing into the bargain). The fun begins in December for ST and Amiga owners at £14.99.



## APOCALYPSE Image Works

The latest fruit from the loins of veteran coder Jason Perkins (*Thing on a Spring, Monty on the Run, Time Machine*) is a 90's version of Dan Gorlin's 64 classic *Choplifter*. Set on a remote Indian island in the middle of a raging civil war, Apocalypse casts you as a rebel helicopter pilot whose job it is to airlift refugees to safety amid the jungle carnage. There's a strong emphasis on graphic violence, with "realistic" combat, gore all over the shop and a few nice touches, including a very bloody intro sequence and the ability to drop napalm on unfortunate enemy troops. Originally titled *Rebel*, the game was renamed due to its apparent similarities to the helicopter sequences in Apocalypse Now. Those who managed to get a sneak glimpse of Apocalypse at the recent ECES Show were uniformally impressed by the game's remarkable speed and incredible body count - and no doubt you will be too when the game's released in the Spring.



## TIP OFF Anco

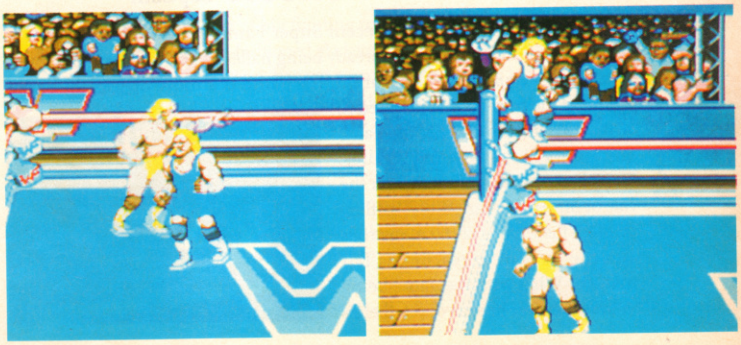
*Kick Off* addicts who can't wait for the arrival of *KO3* in Spring next year may wish to swap their studs for a pair of Reebok Pumps as an enjoyable way of spending the intervening time. Designer Steve Screech has taken the same winning techniques he used in the *Kick Offs* and put them to work on the basketball court for Tip Off, his latest sporty effort. While Cinemaware's *TV Sports: Basketball* reigns supreme on the hardwood boards, the boy Screech is hoping to change that with what he claims is the most action-packed interpretation of the sport yet. Despite the reduction in team and pitch size, Tip Off is already shaping up to be every bit as addictive as its Soccer daddy, including such features as man-to-man marking, full player stats and a league competition. Admittedly the idea of *Kick Off* on a basketball court does sound very sexy indeed, and if Steve can put that tantalising concept into practice successfully, within a couple of months we could well be staring down the barrel of the most impressive sports game yet. Here's hoping, anyway.

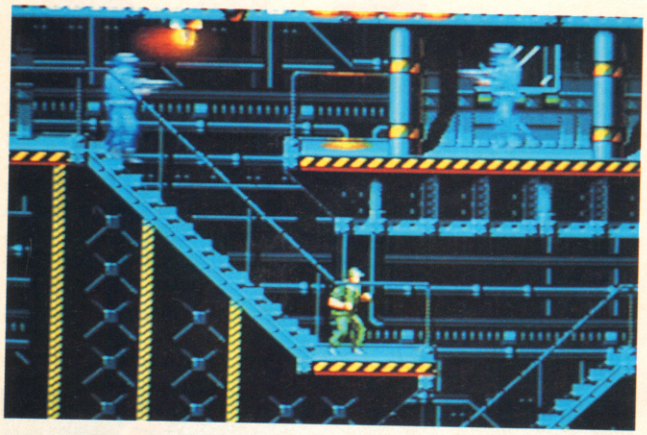
## SMASH TV Ocean

More licenced fare from the firm that turns them out like there's no tommorow. This one's one of Ocean's more eagerly-awaited products, coming as it does from the excellent and ultra-violent Williams coin-op. It's all set around a futuristic game show, where contestants risk life and limb, battling through monster-infested studios to get at "great" prizes like videos and toasters. When cranked up to full tilt, the coin-op's awesome, as scores of hapless zombies pile after the contestants and get mown down by volleys of laser fire. The less fortunate contestants may get their legs blown off by stepping on a mine. In an attempt to emulate the original's dual-joystick control, coverters Probe have included an option for both players to connect two sticks if they so desire. Smash TV goes on air this Christmas, and as the show's slimey sampled compere says, "Good luck - you're gonna need it!"

## WWF Ocean

In case you don't know, it stands for World Wrestling Federation, and it's currently the biggest craze with UK kidz since the *Turtles*. Sky viewers will already be familiar with this televisual phenomenon, which consists of more showbiz razzmatazz than actual competition. Ocean has wasted no time in jumping on the bandwagon with this original interpretation of the "sport", which sees you in the squared circle against such WWF Superstars as Hulk Hogan, Mr Perfect, Macho Man Randy Savage, The Big Boss Man, Million Dollar Man Ted Dibiaci and many others. Coming hot on the heels of Summer Slam, the biggest WWF tournament of the year, and with several Superstars crossing the Atlantic this month to take part in a European Rampage, Ocean's WWF has been perfectly timed to catch wrestlemania at its height. Come to think of it, we could do with a decent wrestling game...



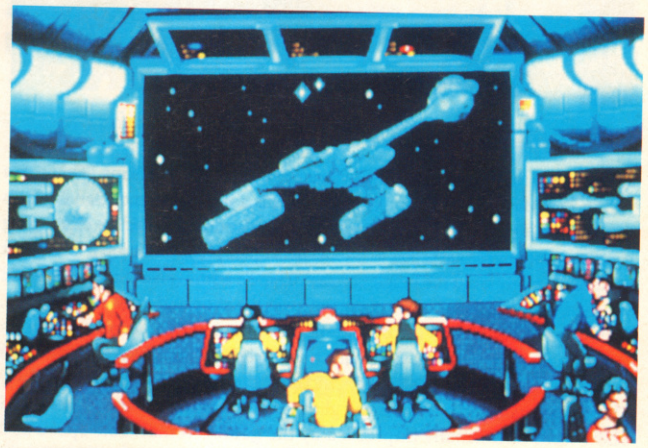


## THE TERMINATOR Virgin

Exquisitely timed to cash in on the phenomenal success of *Terminator 2*, Virgin's Megadrive adaptation of the original 1984 movie must surely qualify as the most long-awaited licence of all time. Put together by Probe Software, it recreates the film's most memorable action scenes (such as the night-club duel and police station massacre), casting the player as futuristic soldier Kyle Reese in his quest to save Sarah Connor from the unstoppable cyborg. It's interesting to note that, apparently due to a legal row over the use of Arnold Schwarzenegger's image, the Terminator appears in the game as a rather ambiguous silhouetted figure. There's been no compromise on the violence front however, and the game sports one of the most impressive intro sequences in years - it's practically identical to the film. The Terminator is set to hit the streets in the early part of next year - keep an eye out.

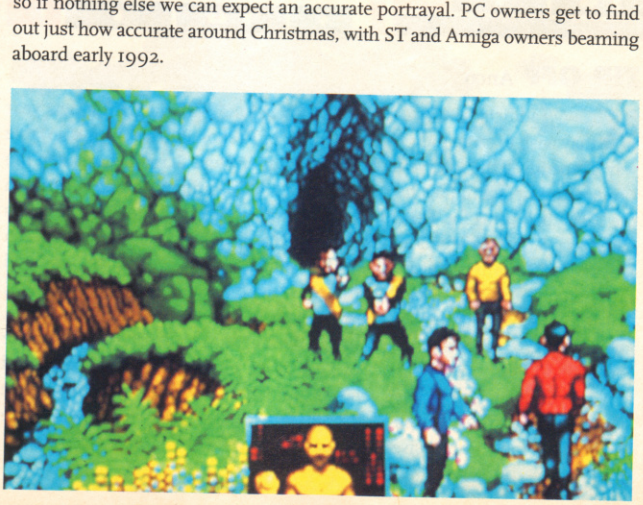
## SUPER GHOULS'N'GHOSTS CapCom

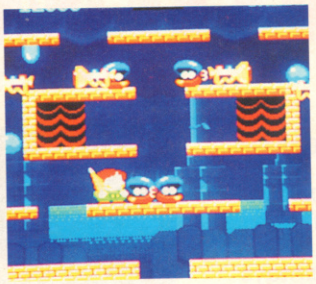
The star of the show at the recent Super FamiCom exhibition in Japan, Super Ghouls'n'Ghosts is already being hailed as the best SFX game yet. Like Irem's *Super R-Type* before it, the game is a more or less the same verion as the coin-op that inspired it, with a number of tweaks, enhancements and custom features. The player once again takes on the role of Sir Arthur Lancelittle, battling through the legions of the monstrous and the undead to rescue his fair maiden. What with the game being unavailable over here as of yet, there's very little information available - although the ripples coming over from Japan are very positive indeed. With the release at last of the FamiCom in the USA (remodelled and renamed the Super Nintendo), it may not be that long until us poor Europeans can get our hands on them officially too - but until then, Super Ghouls'n'Ghosts should be filtering through on import within the next month or so. ACE will be first with the



## STAR TREK: THE 25th ANNIVERSARY Electronic Arts

US designers Interplay (*The Bard's Tale, Castles*) have left the medieval scenarios behind and opted for something a little more up-to-date with its interpretation of the classic sci-fi series Star Trek, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the show this year. All the familiar characters, including Scotty, Checkov, Uhura, Sulu and McCoy join you, as Kirk, on the bridge of the USS Enterprise as you embark on 14 independent missions, each presented as a TV episode. You get to play with warp engines, transporters, phasers and torpedoes as you clash with Klingon, Romulan and rogue Federation ships. The game's a mix of strategy/exploration and arcade action, with space-age combat sequences fought out *Wing Commander*-style. Apparently Star Trek's creator Gene Roddenberry acted as a consultant during the game's development, so if nothing else we can expect an accurate portrayal. PC owners get to find out just how accurate around Christmas, with ST and Amiga owners beaming aboard early 1992.



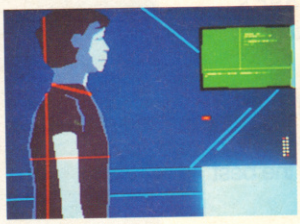


## PARASOL STARS Ocean

Subtitled *The Story of Bubble Bobble III*, it doesn't take much to work out that Parasol Stars is the sequel to *Rainbow Islands* and the third instalment in the *Bubble Bobble* saga. Bub and Bob are back on the case, still in human form, although this time, instead of bubbles or rainbows, they're equipped with cute little multi-purpose umbrellas to defend themselves against the multitude of cutesy foes. Parasol Stars sees a return in style to the original *Bubble Bobble*, with the objective being to clear the various screens of all the yummy fruit rather than reaching a specified goal. It's also the first game to scroll horizontally - *Bubble Bobble* consisted solely of static screens, and Rainbow Islands was a purely vertical affair. Currently being handled by Ocean's in-house team, Parasol Stars looks set to bring the cute game back in vogue - and quite right too.

## ANOTHER WORLD US Gold

Though Delphine Software is already pulling out all the stops for its adventure interpretation of *The Godfather*, it's still got time to stick its fingers in some other pies - the most impressive of which is the innovative adventure Another World. *Future Wars*' co-designer Eric Chahi has spent two years labouring away on this one, and the result incorporates what is reputedly the most effective Cinematique adventure system yet seen - even by Delphine's high standards - including such cinematic techniques as zoom, panorama and animated close-up shots. In a plot as tenuous as *Future Wars*, Another World tells of a hapless young nuclear scientist who is catapulted into a strange alien world when an experiment misfires. From then on it's exploring and puzzle-solving all the way as your quest to escape from the bizarre planet unfolds. Another World is set for release across all three formats at the end of the year.

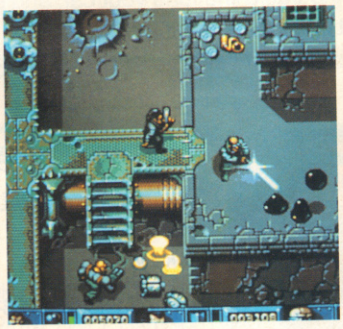


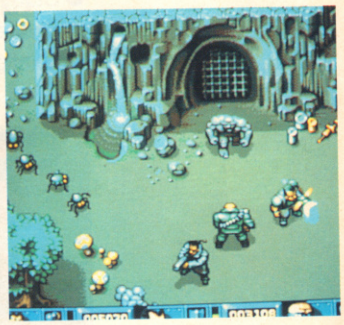
## WIZKID Ocean

Still regarded as one of the greatest arcade games of the eighties, Sensible Software's *Wizball* caused quite a stir when it first hit the 64 back in 1987. Fresh from the success of *Mega lo Mania*, Wiz's original creators Jon Hare and Chris Yates are now hard at work putting the finishing touches to the long-awaited sequel, which promises to be every bit as wacky as the classic original. The story goes that after successfully colouring in the Wizworld, the Wizard and Wizball have fallen, erm, in love and produced a son - the Wizkid. The evil magic mouse Zark (who was thwarted in the first game) is none too happy about and has kidnapped the Wizard and Wizball in order to extract his revenge. Now it's up to Wizkid to get them back by battling through eight platform-orientated levels, rescuing the also-kidapped kittens of Wiz's car Nifta along the way. "It's a pretty original game," says Chris. "I can't really think of anything to compare it to." We shall see for ourselves in a couple of months, but if the quality of Sensible's recent offerings is anything to go by, we should be in for a real treat.

## THE CHAOS ENGINE Renegade

After the less-than-successful venture into the realms of cutesy games with last month's *Magic Pockets*, the Bitmap Brothers' latest effort looks set to put them back on the right track. It's a return to more familiar, violence-orientated turf, combining *Gauntlet*-style arcade action with an innovative RPG element. In an attempt to get away from hackneyed space-age scenarios, designer Eric Matthews has set his game in the Victorian Age - the Chaos Engine of the title is one of the first prototype computers that has malfunctioned and is attempting to distort the fabric of time and space. In an attempt to avert the disaster, as many as three players (with the aid of a joystick adaptor) must blast their way through the factory where the Engine is held and destroy it. Matthews is very proud of the game's RPG undertones, which allows players to create characters with individual personalities, and a system that only allocates bonus points if the player is pulling his weight during play, and not leaving all the work to his companions. To cap it all, graphics wizard Dan Malone has done an excellent job of creating a period atmosphere. Rumours abound that after Pockets, the Bitmaps' credibility is starting to wear a bit thin - let's hope that The Chaos Engine proves the cynics wrong when it's released at the start of next year.





## CYBER FIGHT Electronic Arts

There's nothing like a pair of big fighting robots clanging away at each other to provide some good old-fashioned gladatorial entertainment - and Electronic Arts, obviously wise to this trend, has got a game that's just the job. Cyber Fight has been projected from the frontal lobes of Michael Powell. Hulking great Transformer-style 'bots against each other, armed with all manner of devastating bolt-on weaponry and portryed using state-of-the-art Gourad shading techniques to enhance the feeling of "being there". A PC only product at the moment, Cyber Fight is set for release hopefully by the end of the year. 16-bitters may have to wait a fair bit longer for their versions.

# What will you cha

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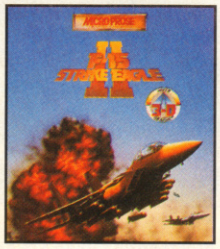


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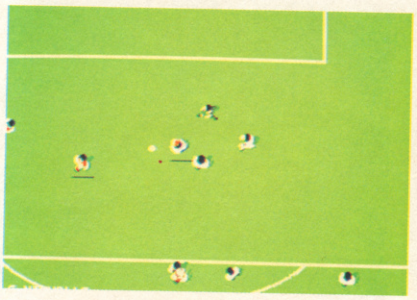
# ACE BENCHMARKS

Over the page, in the new ACE Screentest section you'll find reviews of six of this month's hottest games. To help you make the most of our reviews information (especially the Compare and Contrast panel which you will find adorning each review) we've compiled our list of what we believe are the finest games in each of the following genres.

The aim is to offer both a reference point to help you gauge how well or otherwise this month's titles match up to their peers and a list of games which no software collection should be without. And all for no extra charge!

And remember!

There's a further 30 PAGES of reviews beginning on page 107!



## SPORTS ARCADE

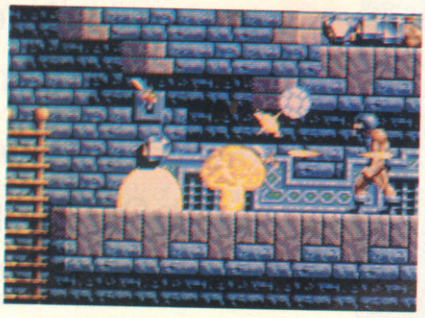
### KICK OFF 2 (Anco)

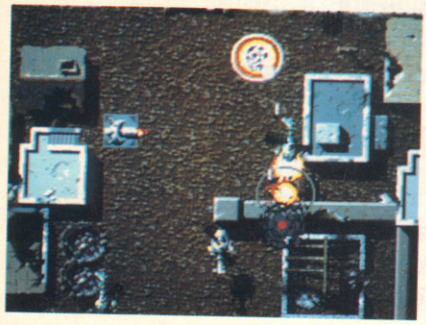
What can we say? It's pretty pointless trying to explain to the unitiated what makes Kick Off 2 so damn playable, but the primary reasons are the ultra-instinctive control mode and remarkable speed that combine to make it the most exciting and rewarding football game ever. As such it's attracted a following so avid that official prize tournaments are a regular occurence.It looks like nothing, and takes time and patience to get into, but once it grabs it'll never let go. Not ever. You have been warned.

## ARCADE BLAST

### SWIV (Storm)

The follow-up to *Silkworm* (itself one of the best blasts in years) succeeds through a combination of frenetic speed, polished presentation and sheer, unadulterated action. Tons and tons of it. The firepower and wastage on screen is of a level that far surpasses anything offered before. It's amazingly tough, but well worth the effort - it's effectively a £25 coin-op without the need for coins.





## ARCADE ADVENTURE

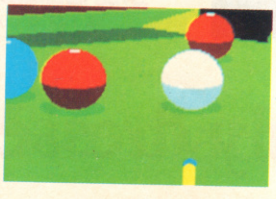
### GODS (Renegade)

While it may be argued that it's not as intrinsically sophisticated as the likes of *Rick Dangerous 2* or *Prince of Persia*, the Bitmap Brothers' platform opus does offer enough fully-rounded arcade action to make it the outright winner in this category. On the surface, it looks nothing more than a levels n' ladders shoot'em-up with with lots of flashy effects, but deeper down it's a right smart little epic with enough quality aspects to keep even the most demanding explorer happy. Its longevity is unquestionable.

## SPORTS SIMULATION

### JIMMY WHITE'S WHIRLWIND SNOOKER (Virgin)

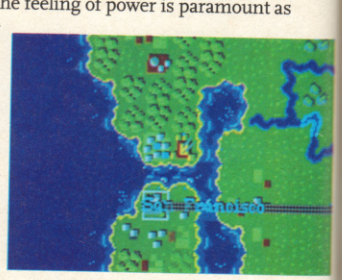
Archer Maclean does it again, and must go down in the history books as having produced the first ever realistic snooker game. Actually, 'realistic' doesn't do the game justice, as it truly is the most authentic computerised adaptation of any sport ever. Period. Tremendous 3D combines with authentic play and more options than ever believed possible, and the result is quite simply awesome. It's just that good.



## STRATEGY

### RAILROAD TYCOON (Microprose)

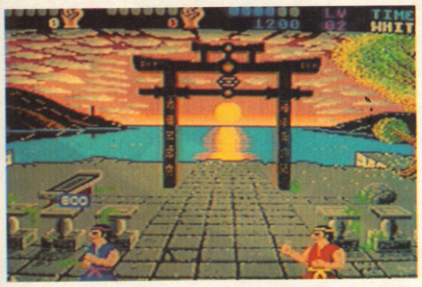
Building a railroad empire across the USA at the turn of the 20th Century may sound like hard work, but for those who like their strategy to run deep, Sid Meier's simulation of that very pursuit is fun Fun FUN! We know, it's difficult to imagine how, but trust us, it is. The feeling of power is paramount as you lay your track from sea to shining sea, conduct big-time business and generally earn loads of cash. That can hardly be bad now, can it?



## BEAT 'EM UP

### IK+ (System 3)

An upgraded and enhanced version of the original System 3 classic *International Karate*, Archer Maclean's IK+ is still unchallenged in its field after three years.



Its most innovative aspect is the addition of a third, computer-controlled fighter, which elevates the action above the average head-to-head boredom and into full-scale free-for-all mayhem. All the standard kicks and punches are there, aloing with an array of novel new moves, such as the double-head kick. Incredible speed, worthwhile sub-games, bonecrunching sound and a veritable galaxy of graphic twists and comedic touches make this quite simply the ultimate fighting game.

**RACING GAME**

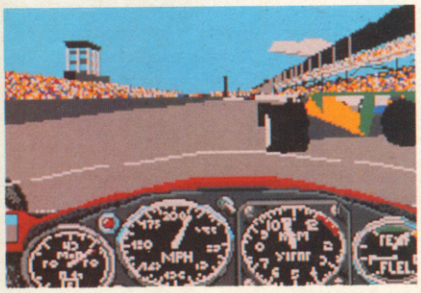
## STUNT CAR RACER (Microstyle)

This month under threat from Gremlin's *Lotus 2*, Stunt Car Racer packs polygon-plotting power and arcade-speed thrills into a novel formula making it the most entertaining race game around. Drive your dragster around a series of increasingly perilous suspended raceways, smashing & crashing your opponent into oblivion. Excellent speed achieved by the polygons combined with fantastic growling audio effects makes this game a true classic.

**RACING SIMULATION**

## INDIANAPOLIS 500 (Electronic Arts)

It's the speed that does it for EA's Indianapolis 500. Quite simply it's faster and more playable than anything else on the grid. The feeling of real speed is stunningly realistic, and that adds all the more to the bone-shattering pile-ups - one of the game's most entertaining aspects. The course at Indianapolis has been recreated with uncompromising authenticity, and a multitude of features, including excellent TV-style replay facilities serve to bolster the realism further. Mind you, it's not put off Geoff Crammond, who's having a crack at bettering it this month.



**SIMULATION**

## CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT (Electronic Arts)

The third game to be endorsed by the barrier-breaking General takes of the tried-and-tested 'flight school' format and makes it all the more enjoyable by putting it in a combat arena. You get to fly every plane you've ever heard of, and it manages to be fun without sacrificing the technical authenticity. What's more, the dogfighing itself is a lot more exciting than is to be found in most sims, and the out-of-flight options and presentation are second to none.

**ROLE PLAYING GAMES**

## EYE OF THE BEHOLDER (US Gold/SSI)

By the mighty sword of Kring! SSI's latest *Dungeons and Dragons* game takes the best bits of *Dungeon Master*, adds a few more of its own, stirs well, and the result is the best bet yet for gamers who like to hurl fireballs at dragons and things like that. It's very deep (ho ho) and offers enough new challenges to take the throne from the game that inspired it. And lo, thy mystic staff of Zorg shall rent the heavens asunder and (and so on to fade...)

**ADVENTURE**

## THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (US Gold/Lucasfilm)

The adventures of would-be pirate Guybrush Threepwood provide the setting for Lucasfilm's most sophisticated and entertaining odyssey to date. It's partly due to the new refined version of the SCUMM™ adventure system, which obliterates the need to wrestle with complex commands, and a very engaging - and funny - script. It's atmospheric, attractive, and packed with clever puzzles. The only thing that's liable to topple it in the forseeable future is the sequel, due out next year.

**ACTION STRATEGY**

## MEGA lo MANIA (Image Works)

Sensible Software's first attempt at strategy is a surprisingly successful one. At first glance it may seem similar to *Populous*, but further inspection reveals it to be a genuinely original strategy epic. Considering the amount of depth the game has, it's remarkably instinctive to play, and has a very refreshing comic thread running throughout. Certainly the most fun of all the god-games, Mega lo Mania also happens to be the best - we'll see what *Populous II* has to say on the matter at the end of the year.

**PUZZLE GAME**

## TETRIS (Nintendo)

There are more official versions of this classic than can be counted on the legs of a millipede, but it's Nintendo's own GameBoy version that is undoubtedly the best. Manipulating blocks to make lines across the screen may sound like watching your toenails grow, but in practice the compulsion factor rises far beyond any level known to medical science. If it's awesome in one player, they haven't invented the word that describes the fun that's to be had in the link-up mode. It's like a bloody religion.

**PLATFORM**

## SUPER MARIO WORLD (Nintendo)

The sooner they release the Famicom over here the better, as that will give more gamers the chance to experince the stunning fourth instalment in the Mario saga. Whatever other hype-swallowing publications may lead you to believe, Mario 4 knocks seven bells out of *Sonic* (and then some) - would you believe there's not a single dodgy bit in any of the 99 levels? It's sheer perfection from beginning to end. What more could you ask for?

**This Month's Games**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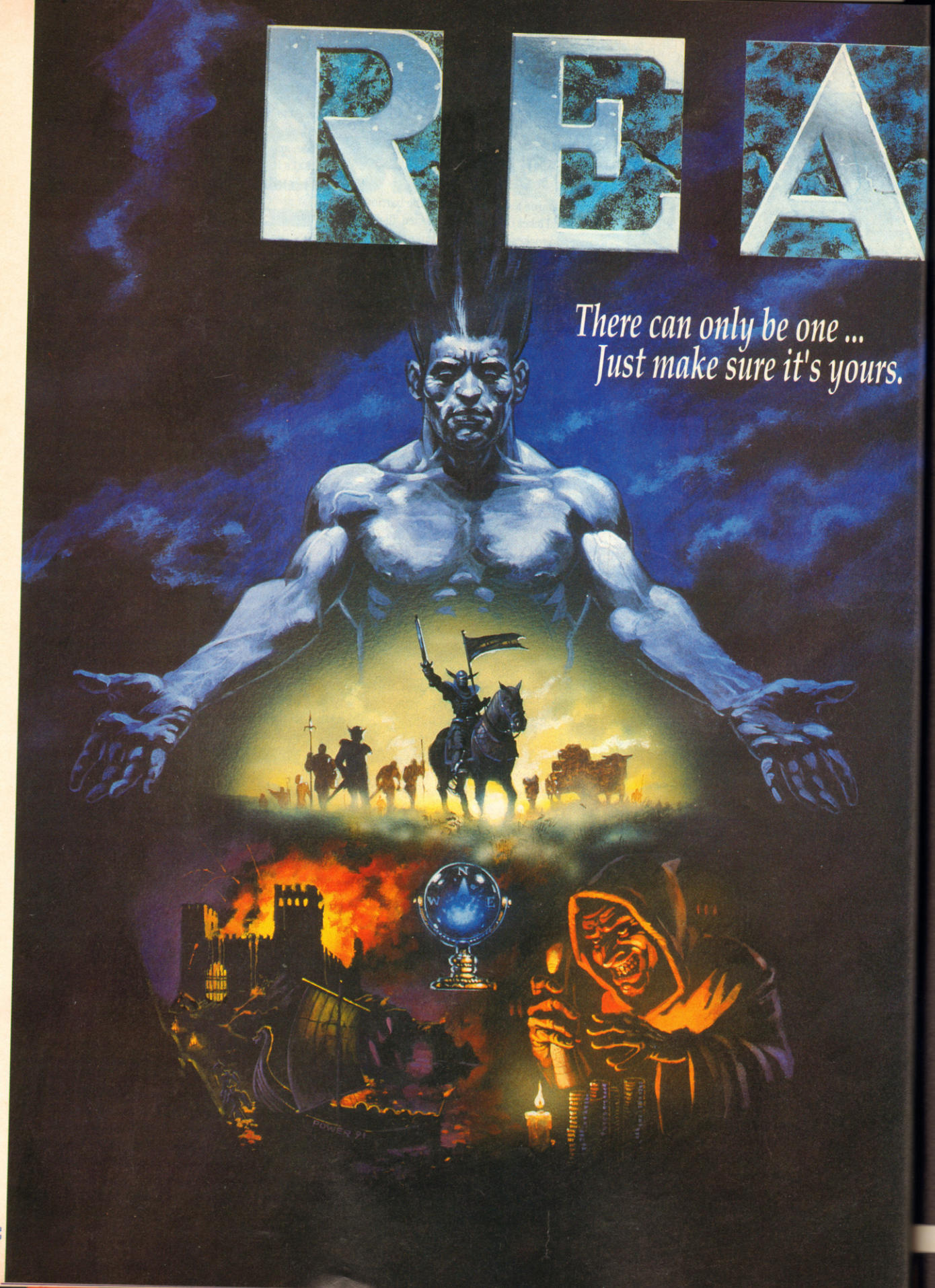
REA
There can only be one ...
Just make sure it's yours.
N
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E

# REALMS

*Love Thy Neighbour?*
*Or Put Him To The Sword?*
*The Choice is Yours.*

*For the first time, you can take COMPLETE control of your own destiny as you attempt to dominate an entire world.*

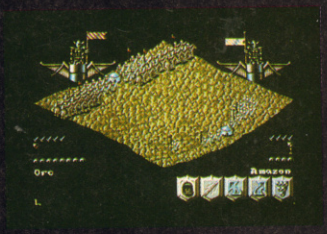
*The neighbouring Realms are growing in strength at your expense. Do you build lines of supply to barter with them? Or build armies to battle with them? Each Realm vies to be the ultimate power.*

*Created by the award-winning Graftgold development team, REALMS combines the intuitive playability of an arcade game with the depth of strategy usually only found in the most complex simulations.*

*There can only be one.*
*Just make sure it's yours...*

*The King is dead. Long live the King.*
*And the King is you...*

*Endowed with the divine right to rule, you inherit your father's Realm on his death. But the fragile peace has been shattered and war rages between the Realms. Now your brief reign has become a fight for survival.*




*Enter the world of Realms and you could control:*
*~Over 125,000 square mile of fractally-generated landscape*
*~128 armies, each a thousand strong and with definable battle formations*
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*~Six distinct humanoid races*
*The last word in arcade strategy.*

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**Publisher** Gremlin Graphics
**Developer** Magnetic Fields
**Price** £24.99

# LOTUS 2

**Some people are never satisfied. Having already produced perhaps the finest computer race game of all time in Lotus Turbo Esprit Challenge, Magnetic Fields and Gremlin have sought to push the envelope further still with their sequel. The result? A definite, yet qualified success.**

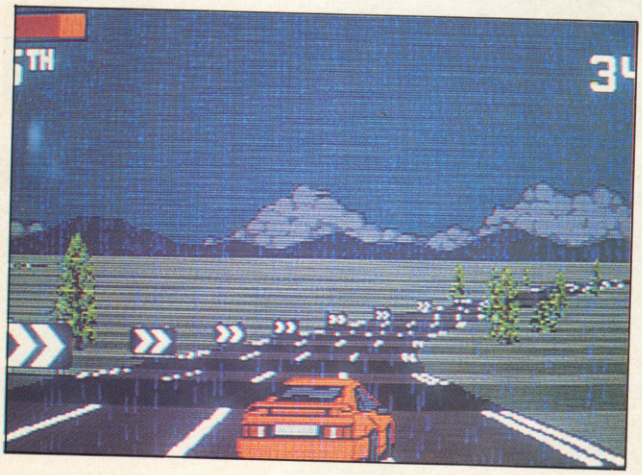
*(Top) On the grid. The line-up of other cars is impressive, but they'll soon be mere specs in the wingmirrors of life.*
*(Above) Faster and prettier trackside graphics impress.*

Definite because Lotus 2 bears marked improvements over the original in a number of technical aspects, but qualified because although the game works well as an individual title, it rewards and challenges the player in an almost entirely different way to its predecessor. As a result, it occasionally doesn't look too good in comparison.

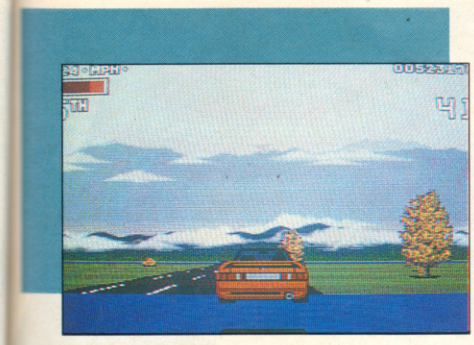
Neither an accurate polygon simulation, nor purely over-simplified arcade blast, the Lotus games deliver the finesse of the former with the adrenalin of the latter. Large, healthy representations of Lotus Esprits and Elans hurtle around the rapidly-plotted courses, barging into each other and flying off the roadside signposts. Drivers who hang around too long or insist on adhering too strictly to the highway code need not apply. That much is common ground for both titles.

The most important difference between the two games' design is that here, play no longer takes place on circuits. Instead, eight long stages, each complete with their own particular motoring hazard, snake their way across imaginary countries, providing *Outrun*-style as opposed to *Super-Sprint*-style excitement.

This is not a point that should be taken lightly, for it greatly affects the feel of the game. The removal of the lap system makes it tricky (despite a well-intentioned distance-o-meter) to gauge exactly how close the two drivers are to each other. Over a number of laps, a player's lead can be tangibly eroded. Over a long stage, it's much harder to determine progress. However, longer stages make for an exciting feeling of ground-covering race-through-the-night madness that was plainly absent from the first title. Simplified, the deal is this. The nature of Lotus 2 makes it more satisfying to pass a number of computer controlled drivers than pit your skills



*(Left) Some of the graphic touches on show. Greater inclines in the hills affect the speed of the player's car while the sharper bends require occasional braking. The driving rain (this is the storm section, after all) is so convincing, it's enough to have you diving for your shiny mac on even the warmest summer afternoon.*
*Bashing into the chevrons at the side of the track doesn't slow the cars down as much as in the first game, providing a smoother, less frustrating race.*



**Obviously, the easiest and most relevant point of reference to draw on is *Lotus 1*. Clearly, producing a sequel to such a popular racing game is tricky enough. Trickier still when you bear in mind that the success of the first title rested on a number of factors which, simply in order to make the second game sufficiently different, have had to be changed. The first game worked on a laps basis, and here we have stages. Lotus 2 is far more forgiving of drivers' mistakes than in the first outing. A single crash in the first game could easily cost the unfortunate driver the race. Here, owing to the length of the stages, it's more to do with how the forced errors snowball into a big enough chunk of time to make the check-point unreachable.**

**Lotus 2 is, technically, a far superior game with swifter graphics, more detailed and varied levels and a better impression of speed. And there's no doubt that as a solo game it plays infinitely better than the first. As a two-player affair, however, *Lotus 1* still reigns supreme.**

**The link-up option serves as a worthwhile novelty, although in a sense it only helps regain the spirit of duelling motors which was already present in the original.**

**It's important to remember though, that simply because the giddy heights of the original haven't been attained in this particular aspect, Lotus 2 is still a superb game.**

against - essentially - one human. In that sense, it is a much better one-player game, but the gladitorial two-player struggles of the first title are no longer present. It's this point which obviously determines whether Lotus 2 is an appealing prospect or not.

The key to Lotus 1's success was twofold. For the first time in a sprite-driven race game the player was convinced that he had control over the behaviour of his car to a degree facilitating genuine improvements in driving style. Also, the timings of each circuit were balanced so perfectly with the difficulty level and the amount of objects to crash into that even on the early courses a few careless chevron-clippings could make the difference between success and failure. It has proved to be a tough act to follow.

A familiar options screen helps the player dispense with tiresome automatic/manual gear and acceleration mode selections in the same manner as last

time. Here, however, there are a few additions. A password system, enables players who have made sufficient progress in the game to skip to the desired level without having to drive through stages already mastered. Although this initially appears to be a bit of a godsend, removing the need to slog through level after level of previously conquered track, there is a danger that, in the same way as *Outrun* is viewed, once all the levels have been completed, there's little incentive to return. The Link option allows (via a cable connecting two machines) up to four players to race simultaneously. Admittedly, this feature is hardly likely to be in day-to-day use, but it helps to regain the feeling of human vs human competition.

As the "Marks, Set, Go!" countdown gives way to the growl of the assortment of Lotuses in pedal-to-metal mode, the trackside objects pull toward the player with impressive speed and a number of facts become apparent.

Firstly, in an over-enthusiastic tribute to the legendary handling finesse of Lotus motors, the player is afforded amazing control over his car. Only the tightest bends necessitate any application of the old "anchors" and pulling into most corners even from the outside lane will bring the car into the inside lane allowing some impressive apex-cutting antics. It's easy for the player to convince himself that in real life he's an excellent driver thanks to the ease and flexibility of control.

Once underway for a few seconds, the nature of the race will become clear. Computerised drivers are no longer of an especially high standard. Rather than being regarded as realistic individuals vying for success, the auto-cars tend to serve more as mobile hazards, weaving across the lanes and, for the most part, simply getting in the way. Since there is no need to finish the race in a qualifying position (just within the time limit will allow progress to the next stage) there's little incentive to necessarily "beat" any of these cars, just avoid them when they appear.

Checkpoints flash past at regular intervals, resetting the countdown-to-game-over which sits in the

**otus 2's makes it considerably more satisfying when played solo, since the gladitorial feel of two-player racing find itself struggling in the new format of long check-point laden stages**

# STAGE FRIGHT

Let's take a closer look at those stages "in", if you will, "full".

**Forest**

The first stage introduces the player to a number elements in the game. Rivers slow down the cars unless they're jumped over using the logs which block the road. The logs must be hit head-on in order to achieve a jump.

**City**

Oncoming traffic and berserk lorry drivers hamper the player's progress. The right hand lane is clear of racing cars but a smash with an oncoming vehicle will considerably slow up the proceedings. Driving through the wheels between the front and back of the trucks earn the player bonus points. Indeed, rather than being score-heightening trick for top drivers, it's vital if the stage is to be completed in time.

**Desert**

Sand blown onto the edge of the road will slow down drivers who insist on straying from the center line. Extra caution is needed owing to the lack of road signs. Instead, cactii along the side of the road are the only indicators of the player's route through the yellow mess.

**Snow**

A maximum effort is necessary to retain control of your usually limpet-like car which in this stage skids around like there's no tomorrow.

**Fog**

Dramatically reduced visibility inevitably slows this section right down. All objects in the distance, be they cars, trees or oil-slicks are scarcely visible. Only when back-marker looms up out of the fog does the player have a chance to react. This stage perhaps works the best, combining excellent graphic appeal with an exciting gameplay twist.

**Night**

The city at night is a much more challenging place than during the day. The number of trucks on the road has been reduced but the hazard levels are high.

**Marshland**

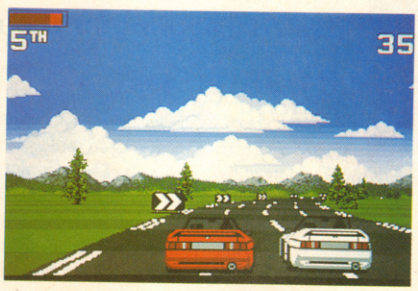
Have you ever been had, in Marshland? Windy tunnels and more jumping. Oil patches have the player slippin' and a-slidin' while the water at the edge of the road (it is a marsh, after all) slows them down. Fiendish.

**Storm**

Possibly one of the most depressing levels ever to appear in a computer game. The rain comes down in sheets making the most miserable sound. Lighting flashes and thunder rumbles. Is it our imagination or is the whole level uphill too? It's enough to put you off your dinner.

*...And we won't start the clock until you've given your first answer...*
*In a peculiar Family Fortunes sort of way, Lotus drivers are given time to accelerate up to speed before their seconds start ticking away on crossing the start line. Even so, time is the player's worst enemy, far more testing than the computer-controlled drivers.*

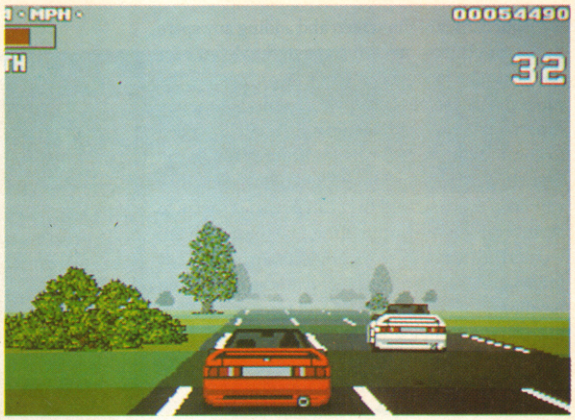
*Each stage has an excellent "look". Here, in the desert, it's almost possible to imagine the heat haze shimmering in the distance. Deeper sand at the side of the road will further slow drivers already suffering from relatively few road signs.*

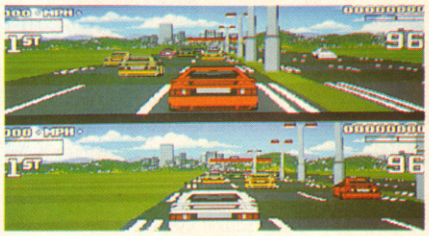



**Overtaking on bends may be motoring taboo in the real world, but it's the only way to get on in the Land of Lotus. Extra gas will help players understeer around their target vehicles on the outside in a *most* satisfactory manner.**

*Storm level. Stinking, lashing rain lowers visibility and screws up the handling of the cars. Computer-drivers, as ever, seem to be more in-tune with the elements and appear to be able to drive just as fast as ever.*

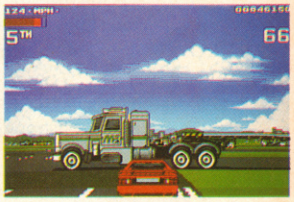
**On long approaches to streams which cross the roads, it's best to get a straight line on the log nearest the stream. Hitting it squarely will bounce the car up into the air and completely avoid the speed-sapping water.**





*The city level offers more heroic drivers the chance of driving on the wrong side of the road. Obviously, the advantage is that they have a clear route and don't have to worry about overtaking. The disadvantage is that a collision with an oncoming car is extremely unpleasant.*

**Also in the city, lorries crossing the main carriageway must be carefully negotiated. Bonus points are available for drivers who can pass in between the front and back wheels of the artics.**



**Original. The difficulty level for most stages escalates well, though, as player are forced to learn new skills each stage.**

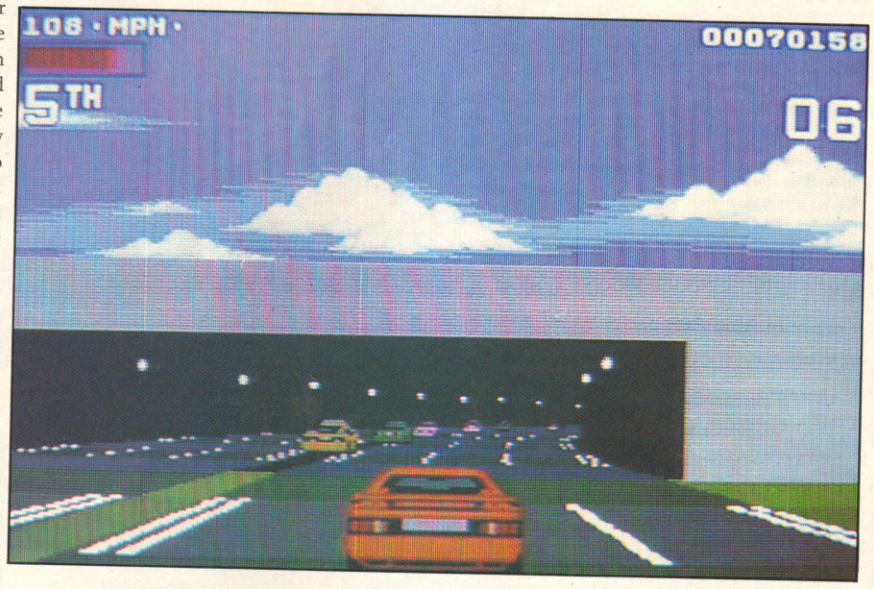
53▶ top right corner of the screen and adding any spare time from the completed stage to the default for the next. The faster one section is completed, the more chance there is to complete the next. Although experienced players may not appreciate the need to continually strive for better times through the first checkpoints, toward the end of the stage they will need every second they can get, so it's wise to start scraping the bonus time together early on.

Utterly distinct from its predecessor, Lotus 2 is forgiving almost to the point of daftness. Ploughing headlong into the chevrons and trees which line the road results in a scarcely noticeable loss of velocity and repositioning on the track. Especially ignorant drivers who insist on mowing down a bunch of signposts or saplings will find themselves ground down to a halt, but those who make the most of the friendliness of the crash routines will find their whole driving experience largely frustration free.

The different courses (see panel) have particular idiosyncrasies which challenge the driver in new ways. The actual width of the road, although one of the most basic variables effects the driving style more radically than most. Narrow roads actually do make the driver slow down and make overtaking difficult. It may sound like a small point, but this does throw up all sorts of frustrations. While the clock may indicate that the trip to the next checkpoint will be a breeze, encountering a couple of lengthy narrow stretches of road will axe virtually every spare second accumulated thus far. Success is most readily achieved by drivers who keep going absolutely at their hardest all the time.

By far the best strategy is to overtake a vehicle as soon as it is reached, especially if the overtaking move is being made on a bend. Dithering around and waiting for computer cars to get out of the way is a waste of time. It's better to simply drive around them.

Careful use of acceleration and the width of the road allows the player to either understeer around




*The rather ridiculous scoring system serves as an easy ability-gauge. However, as every good game player knows, a score don't mean diddly unless you've got the staying power to win through to the end.*

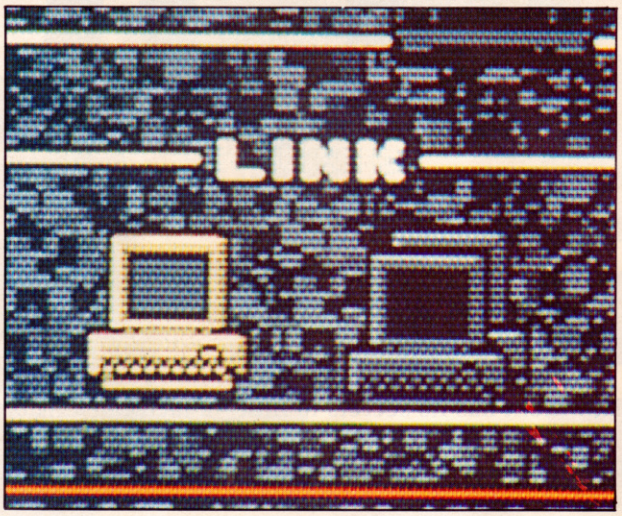
**The nature of the game's once-completed-little-interest-left courses may hamper its lasting appeal. Perhaps Lotus 2 has become an unwitting conformation of the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" addage.**

the target car or slide through taking the inside line. Perfection of this strategy combined with the simple but important discipline of watching cars in the distance as they approach in order to predict their track position then the overtaking move is necessary will yield a great deal of satisfaction. The closest comparison for this mix of speed and skill being continually rewarded is probably the *Super Hang On* coin-op.

Visually, Lotus 2 is a marvel. Objects at the side of the road are highly detailed and absolutely scream past. More attention has been given to the cars when turning and the differing weather conditions are represented by moody lighting and the like. The effects are so successful, in fact, that the Storm level with its thunder and lightning and cats'n'dogs rain is actually quite depressing.

The behaviour of the cars is effected quite dramatically by their environment, exactly as one would expect. Driving through water slows the cars down and makes steering difficult. Snow and ice on the road make the Esprit or Elan skit-

(Right) Lotus 2 in action. Throughout the different stages, the weather and other external forces on the cars can turn the race around. One minute the player will be wrestling only with his gas pedal to squeeze the very last mph out of his vehicle, and the next he'll be negotiating tiny twisty roads in the fog. Here, Lotus 2 site head and shoulders above the competition, and until each course has been mastered, even the flawed two-player mode will continue to hold the attention.




ter around like a snake on a bed of marbles.

Owners and in particular dedicated fans of the original may view Lotus 2 with suspicion. It is no match, by any means, for the original's excellence in the duelling humans stakes. Its stage system as opposed to a lap setup depletes this element particularly. However, when played solo it's the best, offering simply excellent graphics and phenomenal speed, polished off with a front end, music and sound unmatched in the classyness of its finish.

Still, it's interesting to ponder what shape the game would have taken if, as was originally planned, no actual Lotus licence were attached to it. The moment it was decided that a sequel was to be produced, quite *how* it would differ from the original and yet still retain the Lotus name was a problem. Lotus were understandably unkeen to have their glorious spirit of British fair-play motors depicted being smashed or crashed, while producing that sort of title could have been exactly the answer to Gremlin's similarity problems.

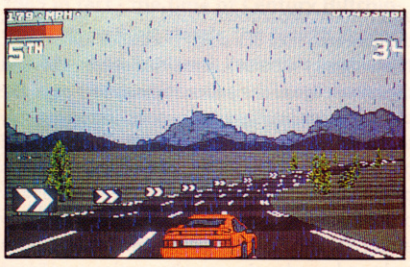
Particularly appealing would be a game using the technological ability of Lotus 2 combined with some more adrenalin-surging action. Consider how excellent a *Chase HQ* treatment of the genre, with armour-plated Esprits tearing across the picturesque British countryside throwing down nails and oil-slicks or doing each other in with rocket launchers and machine guns, barging opponents off the side of the road, down into chasms etc would have been. The decision, of course, went the other way, and so it's no fault of Magnetic Fields that none of these elements have been included.

## Link Up

**Four players can enjoy the thrills and spills of Lotus 2 thanks the the ingenious link-up option. Each machine displays a split-screen with a different colour car for each of the human controllers. Far superior than the simple two-player-on-one-machine set up. Seeing one's friends' agony and ecstacy as they live and die at the hands of a cunningly-placed chevron is most enthralling.**

## Amiga version

**Even considering quite how spoiled Amiga owners have become when it comes to speed on their machine, Lotus 2 cannot fail to impress. The trackside objects simply fly by. The music rocks out in fine style and improvements and optimised routines allow even better control over the car and speedier response times. As an example of top-notch no-nonsense programming, it's quite an achievement. Disk access times could do with a touch of tweaking, though.**



*And finally, for the first time ever, Lotus fans get to see a full screen's worth of action, as opposed to the half-and-half treatment they're used to! Huzzah!*

## RATINGS

### LOTUS 2

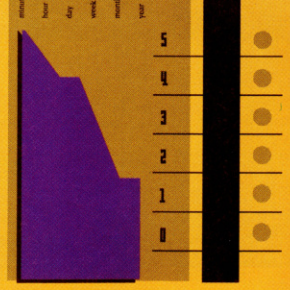
| | |
|---|---|
| Extremely fast | Not particularly satisfying 2-player mode |
| Lots of long stages | Slightly annoying water slow-down business |
| Excellent learning curve on car control | Some additions are a little gimmicky |
| Link-up option | |
| Plenty of variety | |

**790** AMIGA RATING

| G | IQ | A | FF |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 4 | 6 | 6 |

**Immediate appeal is extremely high, and the excellent presentation and speed will maintain the player's interest for some considerable time. However, some of the glitches in gameplay and in particular, variations from the first title's excellence could prove frustrating & would sap the interest. The link up option will provide long-term fun if there's always a spare person with an Amiga around to help out, but the nature of the once-completed-little-interest courses may hamper the game's lasting appeal. Perhaps Lotus has proved to be an especially unwitting confirmation of the "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" addage.**

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE

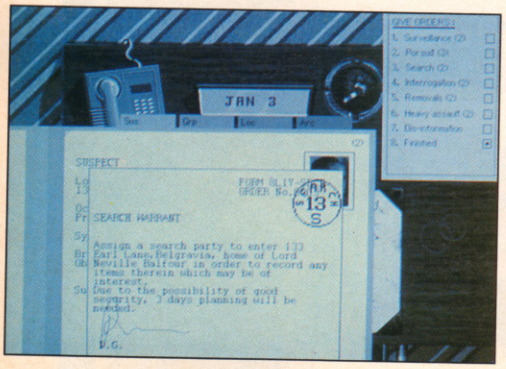


**Genre** Strategy
**Publisher** Virgin Games
**Developer** PSI Software
**Price** £34.99

# FLOOR 13

**Every government has its secrets to hide - a fact that a whole generation of novelists from John Le Carre to Tom Clancy has been earning a respectable living from for the past three decades. But while we all know of the nefarious activities and goings-on in Eastern Bloc countries and** tinpot dictatorships, it's nigh-on inconceivable to suggest the existence of, say, a secret police force here in dear old Blighty, capital of democracy.

Or maybe it isn't. After all, the primary function of a secret police force is to be secret, and as long as it does its job properly, who's to know if it even exists? The idea of such behind-closed-doors governmental activity has been tackled several times in recent years in a variety of media - Alan Moore/David Lloyd's moody graphic novel *V For Vendetta* painted a very gloomy picture of a Neo-Nazi Britain of the 90s, while Ken Loach threw some controversial light on the subject last year with his cinematic political thriller *Hidden Agenda*.




And now we have a game that, by posing the "What if...?" question in the most blatant style imaginable, hasn't done a bad job of attracting plenty of controversy of its own. Admittedly it seems as if Virgin went deliberately out of its way to attract as much undue attention as possible by approaching leading figures from the political, journalistic and show-business worlds to contribute storylines to the game. And although most of the people contacted turned the opportunity down, the upshot of the exercise has since included articles in *The Times* and *The Guardian* and several phone calls to the Virgin offices from an 'interested' Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. No doubt by the time that Floor 13, which boasts what must be the most overtly political and paranoiac storyline to date, hits the shelves it won't be the only thing that is hitting something.

Set in present day London, *Floor 13* tells of a secret government department based on, you guessed it, the thirteenth floor of a shady Docklands tower block. It's an agency without a name, that operates beyond the knowledge of the police, the military - even the country's own intelligence agencies - reporting only to the Prime Minister himself. To all intents and purposes, it's an agency that doesn't exist - but has power and influence far beyond the scope of any official body. Its job? To provide a political 'safety buffer' for the increasingly megalomanic, callous and treacherous government by averting scandalous incidents, dealing with undesirables, controlling outspoken 'subversive' elements and generally erasing anything that could have a damaging effect on the government and affect its public standing.

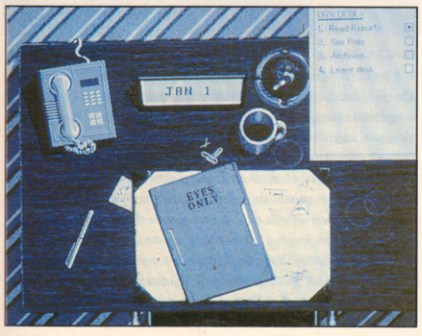
Due to the department's unofficial status, normal laws don't apply to its operations and so the tools of its trade are awesome. Murder, torture, corruption, invasion of privacy... when it comes to the defence of the Realm, anything goes. With such a formidable armoury of tactics, the task in hand may not sound too difficult - but the real trick is carrying out an effective and ongoing campaign of suppression without ever giving the outside world the impression that anything devious is actually going on.

The game's opening does a neat dual job of starting the player off, while giving a first glimpse of just what lengths the secret ministry will go to in order to avert trouble. When the agency's Director General is deemed inefficient and potentially dangerous, he meets with a demise involving a window, several hundred feet and a concrete pavement. The player is brought in replace him as the department head. Once inaugurated as chief of the secret police force,

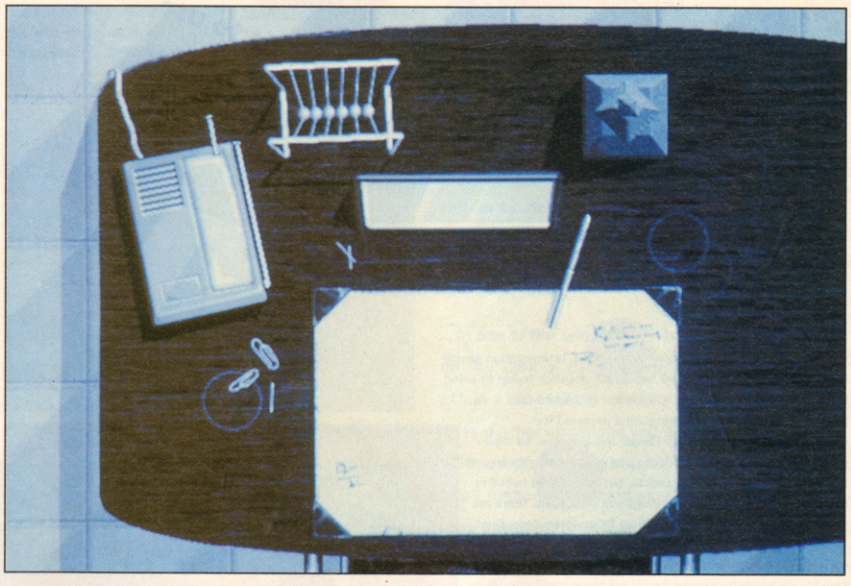
*The Prime Minister is quick to respond to your actions, be they good or bad. If the press starts playing up, or you fail to avert a scandal, you could be hauled over the coals. Do a good job, however, and your department could be expanded, resulting in more resources for the various units.*

*Two type standard modern a*

**In terms of involvement and atmosphere, Floor 13 is the closest thing yet to an interactive thriller novel.**

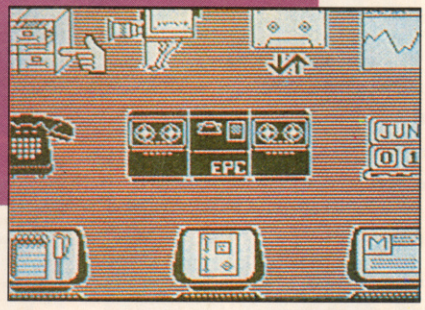



*Two types of office decor are available. Traditionalists can opt for the standard wooden desk and panelling, while hipper cats may prefer the modern art on the walls, formica furnishings and trendy executive toys.*



the player receives a less-than-warm welcome from the disgruntled Prime Minister, who is quick to warn the player that should he or she prove as unsuccessful as their predecessor, they too could be taking a crash course in unaided flight.

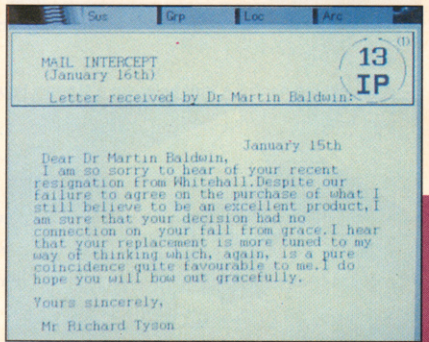
As Director General, one of the player's primary common-sense obligations is never to get their own hands dirty, and so the entire game is effectively run from the 13th Floor office, reading reports gathered by intelligence personnel and dispensing orders to the heads of the various sub-departments who do all the real dirty work. As a result it's probably the most sedate game in years in terms of what goes on on-screen - for the vast majority of the game takes place behind a desk, with the only things changing being the constantly-updated newspapers, reports and files from the departments that comprise the only window on the world. But even though the location seldom changes, the game's fast pacing and subtle dovetailing of the multitude of scenarios and plots ensures that the game's pace hardly ever relaxes. In terms of involvement and interest, it's the closest thing yet to an interactive thriller novel.




The ongoing story is woven by means of over a hundred interdependent plots, occuring at carefully timed intervals and overlapping to give the impression of a single, flowing reality. The episodes are wide-ranging in style and content, encompassing high-ranking ministers engaged in dodgy dealings, shady goings-on at government contractors, industrial espionage, treason and even a terrorist attempt on the life of a top-level VIP. But the full story behind each plot never fully emerges - information comes in dribs and drabs, and only by putting together seemingly innocuous and unconnected reports and allocating resources in the correct places can the

**Compare & contrast**

**Such is the nature of *Floor 13*'s innovative approach and execution, it's tricky to find a game in the recent strategy scene that really compares to it. So it's necessary to journey further back - way back to 1985 in fact - the time of Century Hutchinson's aging 8-bit classic *The Fourth Protocol*, based on Frederick Forsyth's bestseller. Though the game came in several sections, including some dire arcade interludes, the main part of the adventure, subtitled *The NATO Documents*, was remarkably similar to *Floor 13* in certain aspects. Surveillance operatives were assigned to suspects, intelligence reports came in, there were political scandals to avert... the game actually managed to do a remarkable job of capturing the spirit of the original novel, and by comparison that goes to further highlight how well *Floor 13* emulates the intrigue and excitement of the modern thriller. But while *The Fourth Protocol* was a fine game, it offered limited appeal, as there was only one objective to meet. Eastman's got the right idea, allowing the size of the game to remain unrestricted by keeping the overall objective at a safe distance.**



**While much of the game can be played from the central office, it's often necessary to visit departments directly for the most up-to-date information. Each of the eight sub-divisions is never more than a couple of keypresses away - a fine example of how easy the game is to use.**

**INFILTRATION**

If a particular group (as opposed to an individual) starts causing the government trouble, infiltration may prove to be the most effective course of action. When agents are assigned to a group, they join as innocent new members, but secretly work against the organisation. They're not spies as such - you don't receive intelligence reports from them - rather they serve to subtly dilute the ferocity of a particular group's actions or opinions from within. The more agents sent in, the more effective their work should be, providing the infiltrated group doesn't cotton on and sets about purging itself of its unwanted elements. Infiltration is a tricky business, and the fate that discovered agents often meet doesn't even bear talking about.

**INTERROGATION**

The most direct way of acquiring information, Interrogation simply involves pulling suspects in off the street and then trying to wring the facts out of them. When a character is marked for interrogation, he/she is abducted and prepared for questioning. Some characters remain untouchable, as their prominence means they're watched by private security around the clock. The majority of suspects, though, can be pulled in without too much fuss and interrogation can begin. There are three levels of questioning, known as Procedures Zero, One and Two. The lowest level is the basic bright-light-in-the-face treatment, while Procedure One adds a fair amount of bare-knuckle violence. Procedure Two is full-blown torture. Only by applying the correct level of torture will the player get any results - too gentle and the suspect won't take the questioning seriously, too rough and the torturers risk pushing him/her to insanity or even death. It's worth remembering that once a subject is abducted, they're as good as dead - when questioning is over, they're disposed of rather than released back into society, where they could become a liability.

**SURVEILLANCE**

A surveillance team can be assigned to any character on whom a report is available, and will sometimes supply the most crucial information in the game. They remain stationary, situated in a hidden location outside the suspect's house and record all movements, such as times of exit and entry. More useful, however, are the telephone taps and mail intercepts. Any calls that the suspect makes or receives are recorded and transcribed into script form for perusal, and copies of any mail delivered are also forwarded to Floor 13. Unfortunately, the content of calls and letters is often quite ambiguous, leaving blanks that must be filled through careful detective work and common sense. A surveillance team will stick with its suspect until he/she becomes "inactive" or they are re=assigned.

**THE DIRECTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE**

The heart of Floor 13, all information from the various departments is sent straight here to be subjected to the player's scrutiny - more time is spent here than anywhere else. Bear in mind, however, that all information that arrives on your desk here is at least a day old, as new reports arrive overnight. For more up-to-the-minute information, you need to report directly to the relevant department. The DG's office also holds the Floor 13 archives, comprising files on all suspects, groups, locations and reports that have appeared previously - handy for collating information, and files are automatically removed as they ceased to be relevant to prevent cluttering. From here you can also check up on the current situation in the polls for the most accurate representation of how well you are doing.

**DIS-INFORMATION**

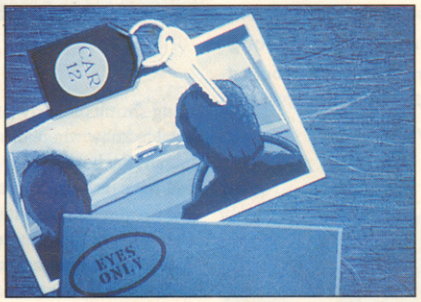
The simplest of all departments, and definitely one of the most satisfying in the short term. If an anti-government busybody starts sounding off in public, there's no more effective way of shutting them up than to have a daily newspaper run a slanderous story about them and smear them. Working from a "slush fund", the Dis-information department will bribe a Fleet Street hack to make up some whoppers about the assigned suspect. There's political capital to be had here, as if someone who expresses anti-government opinions is then found to be a satan-worshipper, it can only look good for the government. The player is limited to one smear campaign per person, and there's nothing more satisfying than "revealing" how that jumped-up Greenpeace loudmouth who's been complaining about unsafe water actually sells heroin to schoolkids in her spare time.

**HEAVY ASSAULT**

This is essentially a very elaborate variant of Removals, consisting of an SAS-style commando raid on a given location. When a location is targetted for attack, a crack military team will turn the place into a bullet-ridden ruin. Heavy Assault works as a handy way of deleting any incrinimating evidence that might otherwise have been found. Used more carefully, it can wipe out an entire conspiracy in one fell swoop.

**REMOVALS**

Assassination. This is really a very drastic action, more overt than any other, so should be regarded as a last-resort. The reason for killing somebody is simple enough. Basically it gets a troublesome character out of the picture. When a removal order is signed, the player gives the hit squad a time limit to carry out the attack - the longer the time given to prepare, the greater the probability that the job won't be fumbled. Sometimes it's necessary to order rush jobs to avert an impending scandal. Some people are beyond the reach of even the poison-brolly men, and need to be dealt with by other means.




**PURSUIT**

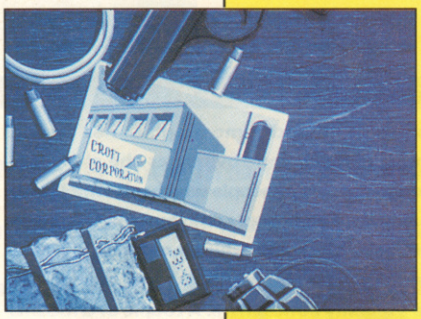
Essentially a mobile extension of surveillance, Pursuit comprises car-based "watcher" units that follow their assigned suspects around covertly and report back on their movements. If the suspect is followed to a private address, the intelligence people automatically find out who lives there and provide his information on a new suspect file, allowing them to be checked out independently perhaps revealing more information. If a more public location is visited, such as an office building, church or park, it is added to the location folder, opening up Search and Heavy Assault possibilities. Unfortunately, Pursuit's capabilities are limited, so while they can tell what time a suspect enters or leaves a location, they can't tell what went on inside in the intervening time.

**SEARCH**

Once assigned to a suspect, a search team will enter his/her house and give the place a good going-over in an attempt to find any useful information. Two types of search are available - Discrete involves a softly-softly approach, where the team is extra careful not to disturb anything. Ransack however, is a much more thorough though destructive process.

## ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

Talk about art imitating life. Of Floor 13's 80-odd plots, a large amount are completely ficticious - but those who follow the headlines are likely to spot quite a few plots that bear an uncanny resemblance to certain recent real-life happenings. Obviously, the names and some of the more incriminating details have been changed to protect the innocent (or not-so innocent), but it doesn't take much nouse to work out what events some of the storylines are based on. By way of demonstrating this, and to show how convoluted some of the scenarios can get, here are brief synopses of some of the more interesting ones...



In Operation Sherwood, a group of retired military crackpots take umbrage with plans to reduce Britain's defensive capabilities, and plan to apply some "shock treatment" to the government by means of a very radical demonstration...

...In one of the secret Thoth missions, you're given the task of helping a fellow lodge member attain a top-ranking minister's job when the post becomes vacant. However two other ambitious young backbenchers are also vying for the job, and with a row about the return of capital punishment raging the press, there's all manner of behind-closed-doors backstabbing going on, including one particularly devious plot to curry favour by one of the candidates. Only by getting to the bottom of the conspiracy can you get "your boy" the job and advance through the Thoth ranks...

...There's a scandal to be covered up when high-ranking minister Cecil Porkinson gets into a spot of domestic bother when his mistress threatens to blow the whistle on their affair to the press. A subsequent attempt to have his bit of fluff assassinated goes horribly wrong, and before too long blackmail and counter-blackmail rear their ugly heads. The whole thing needs to be sorted out quietly before it gets a chance to hit the headlines...

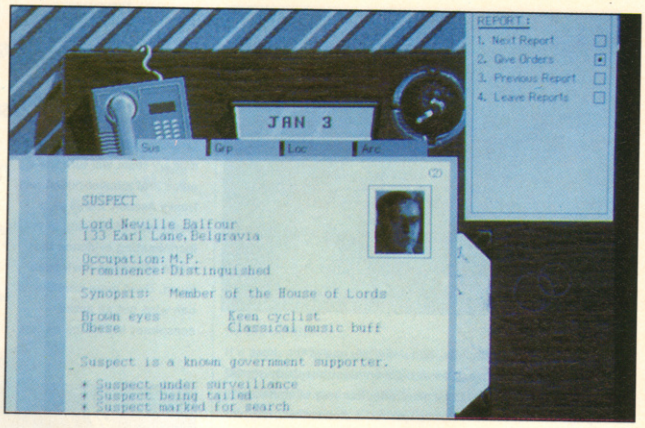
...On a less political - but equally troublesome note - London's seedy Soho district is engulfed by an orgy of violence when the two most powerful crime syndicates, the Chinese Tong and the Columbian drug barons fall out, and then proceed to blow up each other's property in a tit-for-tat war of attrition. Again, the trick is to deal with the situation quietly before it can damage the government...

...Shady goings-on abound when it's revealed that a British defence contractor is selling arms to Iraq - worse still, a top government bod may be in on the treachery...

...An evil terrorist group obtains the security plans of one of the country's biggest atomic power stations, and then threaten to blow it up. The faction's base and plan of attack must be discovered if they're to be stopped in time..

pieces of the jigsaw be fitted together and the overall picture obtained.

Although orders can be given relating to a particular subject or incident at any time, it's wise to wait until the state of affairs becomes slightly clearer, lest the department's actions prove rash - and damaging. With the full picture obtained, deduction gives way to judgement as the player must decide how to deal with the situation in hand, while remembering the need to retain the department's low profile. It's vital that the player doesn't get carried away with their position of power - the press could start asking awkward questions if, for example, somebody who has voiced anti-government opinions is suddenly found with a bullet in their head, and the resultant furore could ultimately prove more damaging than the scandal averted.

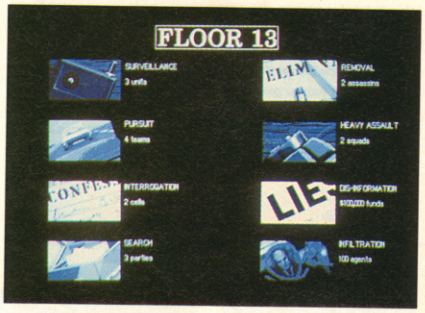



*A standard suspect file includes information on prominence, political leaning and any interesting group affiliations. Note that a so-called "government supporter" could still be dangerous, if their opinions of what would help the government are misguided.*

How the player interprets information and chooses to act on the basis of it provides the main thrust of the strategy in *Floor 13*. Judgment and discretion are the keys to success, along with the ability to be uncompromisingly single-minded through thick and thin. Protecting the government from embarrasment is the only objective, and veering too far in either direction, be it lilly-liveredness or over-the-top wipe-'em-out sadism, will only have a negative effect. If a scandal becomes public, the government suffers in the polls as a direct result of negative public opinion, while successfully covering up embarassing episodes and making everything in the government's garden look rosey results in a poll boost. Of course in the rough n' tumble world of politics, it never hurts to stick the boot into the opposition just a little via the subtle use of misinformation.

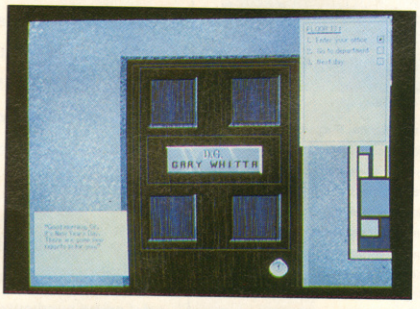
## PC version

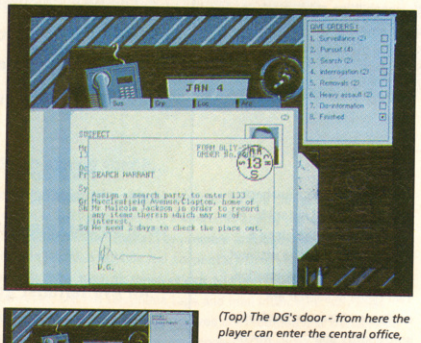
**The use of monochrome graphics has caused almost as much controversy as the storyline, although the sort of people who have complained are probably the same people who buy the colourised versions of classic black-and-white movies. In practical terms the grey shades work along with the moody music to bolster the game's gloomy atmosphere. A couple of criticisms though - the graphics fade in and out when moving between screens, and impatient types might wish the process would speed up a little - it can get a little tiresome during long sessions. Also, while there is no problem with the keyboard control as it stands, some kind of icon-based mouse mode may have proved to be more instinctive.**

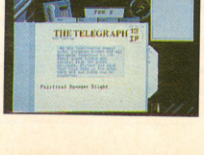



Maintaining a steady lead in the polls provides the player with a set of ongoing objectives. The PM demands a noticable poll result every few weeks or so, and if it's not met then the player is unceremoniously booted out. By the simple virtue of being the elected party, the government remains slightly ahead of the opposition in normal circumstances anyway, so the player's initial task is basically to prevent any major poll drops than embarking on ambitious plans to damage the opposition's credibility or send the government's popularity through the roof. Such tactics are only likely to lead to the department's activities becoming too high-profile and subsequently political damaging.

By use of a simple mathematical formula, the magnitude of any given scandal or incident is directly proportional to the amount of political damage it causes - which is logical enough. To help the player interpret information and provide a supplement to the polls screen, reports of most incidents come with an evaluation of its political repurcussions, good or bad, mild or severe. These provide an invaluable instant aid to decision-making, especially when the player's hands are full with several plots running simultaneously (as is usually to case) and it's vital to know where to allocate limited resources to obtain the best results.



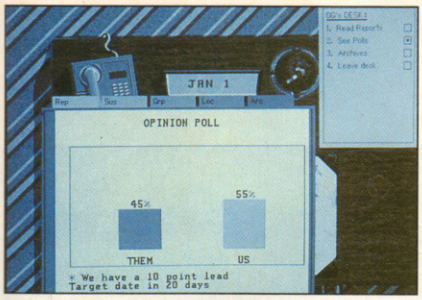



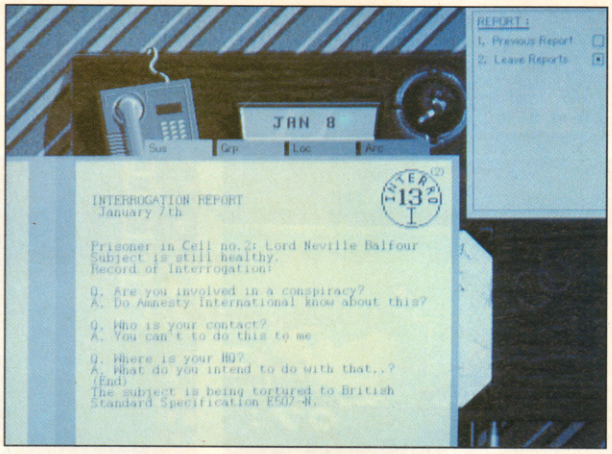




*(Top) The DG's door - from here the player can enter the central office, visit a department or skip to the next day for a fresh set of reports and events.*
*(Above) Before a search order or any major command is passed, it must be confirmed by the signing of the relevant order sheet.*

What's probably most sinister about *Floor 13*, and the main reason why it is already catching so much flak from certain quarters, is that while it offers a vision every bit as paranoiac and frightening as *1984*, it does so in a down-to-earth fashion. We're not dealing with a fantastical futuristic society here - this is supposed to be the real world, present day. And while it would be unbearably tacky to say it's got a storyline that's "ripped from the headlines of tomorrow's newspapers," author David Eastman (*Conflict*) has done a remarkable job of re-working certain major political news stories from recent times as game plots - in fact it's rather worrying to contemplate just how feasible this 'hypothetical' scenario is. Because it handles its subject matter so well, it makes one wonder why the political arena, along with all the attendant corruption, intrigue and backstabbing, hasn't been used more often as a strategy-game scenario. It's this 'real' aspect that provides the game with much of its atmosphere and involvement - there's something more compelling about playing a game with a scenario like this than games which, while equally involving strategically, distance themselves from the player by means of a fantastic or off-beat scenario.

While it would certainly be distressing to see all games based on real-life places and events (games are, after all, meant to an escape route from the rigours of everyday life), *Floor 13* certainly comes as a refreshing change in a genre that has allowed one of its most important elements to stagnate.




*Despite* Floor 13*'s controversially political scenario, it's smart enough in the 'not offend anybody' stakes to retain a certain amount of political ambiguosity throughout, such as in the polls, where the two parties are referred to simply as US and THEM.*

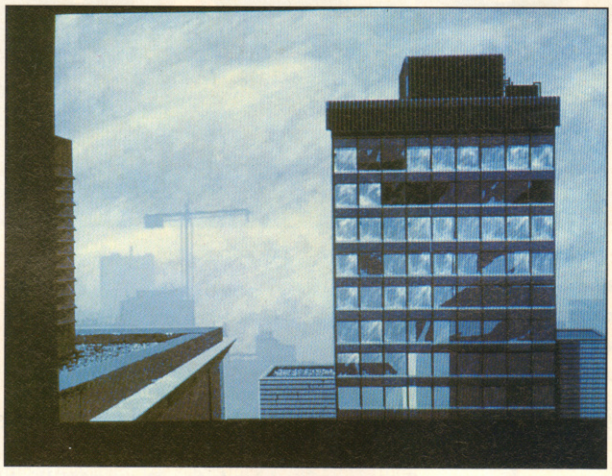
**t's clear that much effort has gone into the creation of Floor 13, and the result is a game that offers a genuinely new approach to the strategy genre, backed up by a scenario that gives the whole thing a kick like a mule.**

*Floor 13* also delivers another much-neglected gameplay angle in its setting the player as the bad guy. While not all the player's actions are necessarily bad (although some are downright despicable), there's a strong sense that the goals achieved are very dodgy indeed - and that provides a twisted sense of enjoyment that goes beyond the initial short-lived experimentations in the 'interrogation' rooms.

Without doubt one of the most innovative strategy games in a long time, *Floor 13* is a marathon rather than a sprint, and as such total dedication and some very careful thought is required if any success is to be had. The need to collate information and deduce connections between the various people, locations, groups and events in order to unravel the complex plots serves to make the whole strategic process deeper and all the more absorbing, especially as some of the plots are as twisty-turny as any espionage novel.

It's clear that much effort has gone into the creation of *Floor 13*, and the result is a game that offers a genuinely new approach to the strategy genre, backed up by a scenario that gives the whole thing a kick like a mule. As such, anyone whose brain capacity extends beyond sending rapid signals to the body's fire-button trigger is going to find this a tremendously absorbing and enjoyable experience. If David Eastman can keep this up, he's going to go far - providing he's not found floating face-down in the Thames first.

● **Gary Whitta**



## Walk Like An Egyptian

**An interesting twist is that, while the player attempts to infiltrate and wipe-out subversive groups and organisations, they remain a member of one themselves. The Secret Masters of Thoth is a bizarre masonic cult based on ancient Egyptian philosophies, and the Grand Master himself pops up to have a quiet word from time to time. As it turns out, the player has a secondary objective of advancing through the ranks of the lodge until he can ultimately become all-powerful. The Grand Master calls upon the player to perform certain tasks for him, and each one completed results in a promotion. Some 'missions' can result in a conflict of interests as what's good for Thoth may be bad for the government. Only the player can decide with whom his loyalties ultimately lie...**

ACE TrailBlazer

## RATINGS

Excellent 'detective' aspect adds no end to the strategy.

Moody story-line provides strong sense of atmosphere.

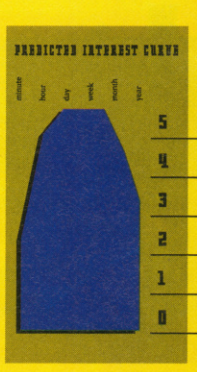
Plots will eventually run out.

Control system could be friendlier.

## 920 PC RATING

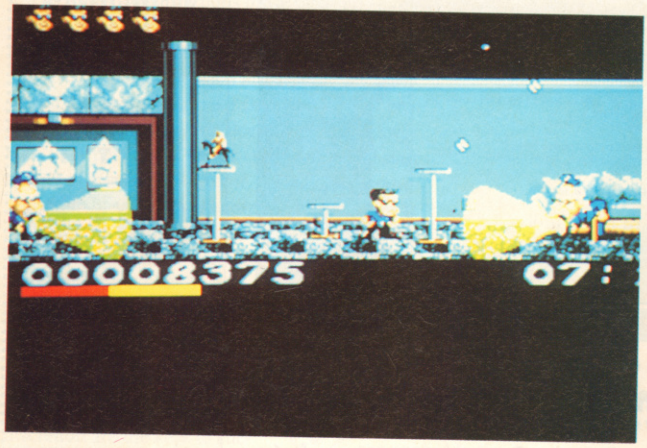
| G | IQ | A | FT |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 9 | 7 | 9 |

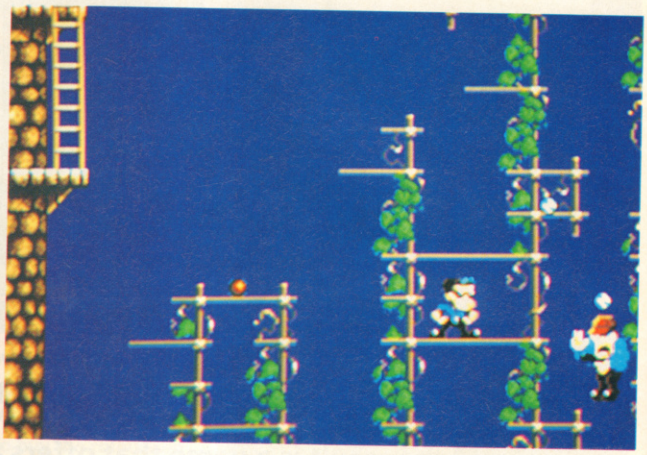
**The scenario grips right from the start, but due to *Floor 13*'s intrinsically-complex nature, it can take some time getting into the actual game. It's a little like a film where you don't quite understand the plot the first time you see it, but the pieces all fit into place with a second or third viewing. Once the ropes are learned, *Floor 13* is as compelling and addictive as any strategy game in years, and what are meant to be short playing sessions can easily stretch to hours without the player realising, as it's all too easy to become absorbed in the multiple storylines. What *Floor 13* ultimately represents is a strategy game that's likely to hold the player's attentions long after all those tired old war-orientated efforts have run out of ammo. For those who have got the patience, there's more value to be had for your money here than anywhere else you're likely to find.**




FLOOR 13 RATINGS

**Genre** Platform
**Publisher** Ocean
**Developer** Special FX
**Price** £24.99



# HUDSON HAWK

*Just as in the film, Hawkins often makes use of ropes and overhead pipes to carry him across perilous heights and dangerous obstacles. Fortunately it's not possible for the player to be knocked off while climbing along, but it is possible to mistime a jump onto a rope or pipe, leaving Hawkins plummetting to whatever horrors lie beneath him.*

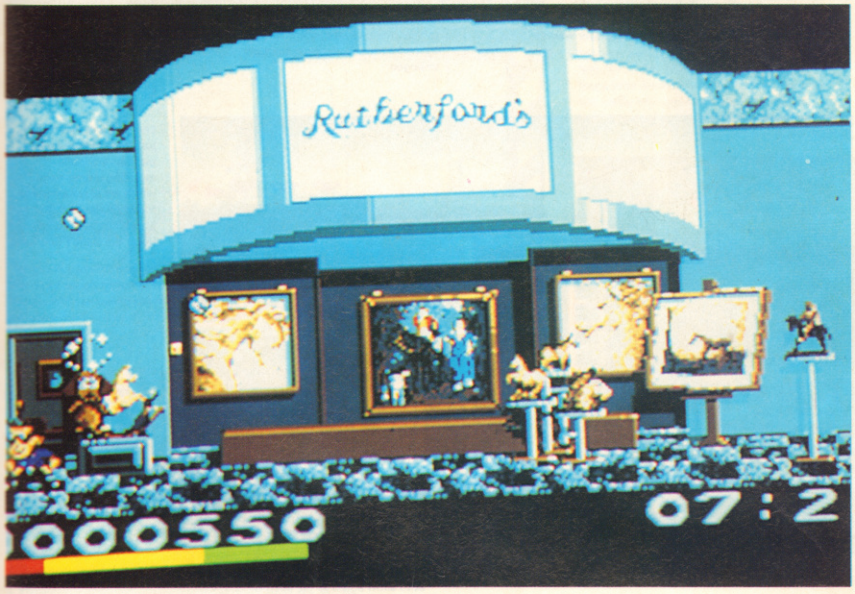
**Catch the action! Catch the excitement! Catch the Hawk!**

**So goes the blurb for Bruce Willis' latest "blockbuster", Hudson Hawk - although if the film's box office takings are anything to go by, it would seem that the majority of movie audiences would rather catch malaria than catch**

this piece of high-budget,low-quality cinematic drivel. Costing a mammoth $40 million, Hudson Hawk was released during the early part of the turbulent summer season as the year's big action movie - and then failed spectacularly to arouse any interest from the punters, who seemed far more keen to see The Silence Of The Lambs. Some theorised that this was due to the action genre having run its course - but now that this school of thought has been blown away by the runaway success of Terminator 2, the only logical reason left for Hudson Hawk's box office demise is that it's a piece of poo.

Actually, that's a bit harsh - especially on poor old Bruce himself, who's got enough to worry about what with all his hair falling out, and is more or less responsible for Hudson Hawk - he's not only the star of the film, but the whole sorry affair was his idea in the first place. By the way, rumour has it that

**Despite the film's spectacular inability to impress either the critics or cinema audiences, Hudson Hawk has managed to spawn what its probably the most impressive film tie-in of the year.**

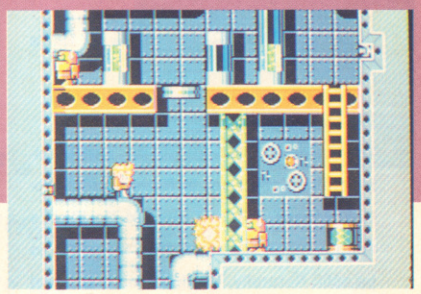



after the film had finished shooting, Bruce's bald patch showed up rather embarrasingly on screen - and so Industrial Light & Magic was called in to eliminate the offending area from the film by drawing hair over it electronically! If that's not a sure omen of failiure, then nothing is.

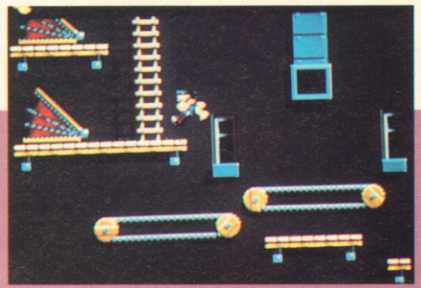
But if nothing else, Hudson Hawk has managed to spawn what is probably the most impressive film tie-in of the year - simply because development team Special FX has ignored all the rules about staying faithful to the movie (nine times out of ten, a sure sign of disaster) and concentrated instead on the business of producing a playable game. It may be controversial, but it's certainly a refreshing change - and the end result is all the better for it.

The plot of the film (such as it is) provides the game with its scenario and runs thus: streetwise cat burglar Eddie Hawkins, fresh out of the clink after a five-year stretch, is anxious to go straight - but his plans fall violently by the wayside when he is blackmailed by a corrupt business syndicate run by a pair of psychotic megalomaniacs to steal three valuable and closely-guarded objects which together will help build Leonardo Da Vinci's fabled alchemy machine. The plan is, with the aid of the machine, to flood the market with gold and bring the world's economy to its knees, Or something like that. Anyway, the player, as Hawkins, must work his way through three platform-based levels, which in turn are divided into independent stages, to recover the trio of valuables. The stages themselves range from basic left-to-right strips where the objective is simply to get from one end to the other very quickly, to sprawling underground mazes where it's just as easy to get lost as it is to get killed.

However the style of gameplay may differ though, there's a strong comic element throughout that binds it all together. Gone are the giant sprites and elaborate technical trickeries of most licenced fare to make way for a more simplistic and effective console-style approach, with smaller, cuter, characters and functional but attractive backdrops. It's a technique that's already been employed to great success in the Rick Dangerous and Switchblade games to which, it must be said, Hudson Hawk owes a lot in terms of style and



**It's easy, at first glance, to make comparisons between Hudson Hawk and that pinnacle of the platform genre, *Rick Dangerous 2*. Both games use comical console-style graphics and combine simple puzzles with levels'n'ladde bas action to provide the fun. Some may even go as far as to proclaim Hudson H to be a Rick rip-off. However, Hudson H relies more often on straight arcade baddy-bashing gameplay than Rick, which only very rarely features combat with marauding enemies - and then it's limited to firing a single shot or dropping a well-timed bomb. In Hudson Hawk, the player often finds himself accosted by all manner of enemies and the use of a bouncing ball as a weapon means rather more skill is required to dispatch an enemy. On the puzzle front, the two games score evenly. Hudson, however, picks up a few bonus points for some of the more devious and intuitive traps that await on later levels. Ultimately, it's all a matter of where your tastes lie - there's no faulting Rick's first-rate gameplay, although Hudson Hawk seems to offer a more rounded experience, combining the best of Rick with stages that call primarily on the player's more basic arcade instincts and the odd pleasant sub-game into the bargain. One thing's for sure though - there's no such thing as a free ride on either game.**



# LEVEL BY LEVEL

### LEVEL ONE

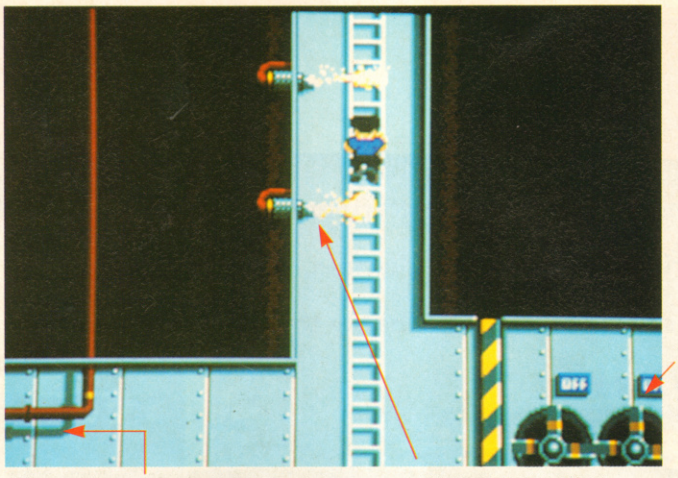
The first level is a fairly simple, horizontally-scrolling affair set in Rutherford's Auction Houses, where Leonardo Da Vinci's famous horse sculpture, the "Sforza" is to be sold. Naturally, Hawkins' job is to steal it before it goes under the hammer, as inside the sculpture is part of the crystal that that is needed to operate the alchemy machine. The first stage is set on the city rooftops, where Hawkins must climb from roof to roof and enter the building through an open window. Once inside, it's just a question of getting from one end of each of the building's floors to the other, where an elevator leads to the next. When the seventh floor (where the Sforza is kept) has been reached, Hawkins must get to the safe and crack it to release the sculpture and enter the next level.

### LEVEL TWO

Things get a lot more complicated in Hawkins' search for the next object, Dav Vinci's notebook, the Codex (which includes plans for the construction of the gold machine). It's kept under lock and key in the Vatican Musuem in Rome, and the only way to get to it is via a complex route through the various underground tunnels, pathways and air ducts. The stages vary greatly in style here, ranging from a Rick Dangerous-type adventure through the air ducts to a frantic race against time through Rome's underground railway mail-delivery system.

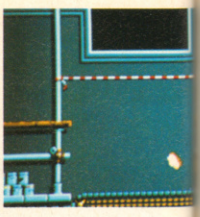
### LEVEL THREE

The final confrontation sees Hawkins attempting to put and end to the whole alchemy project and foil his blackmailers' plans by entering Leonardo Da Vinci's castle and destorying the mirrored crystal that drives the gold machine. The emphasis is set much more squarely on straight platform action here, with battles against a variety of bizarre henchmen including hopping kangaroos, TV-throwing thugs and porky feline foes.

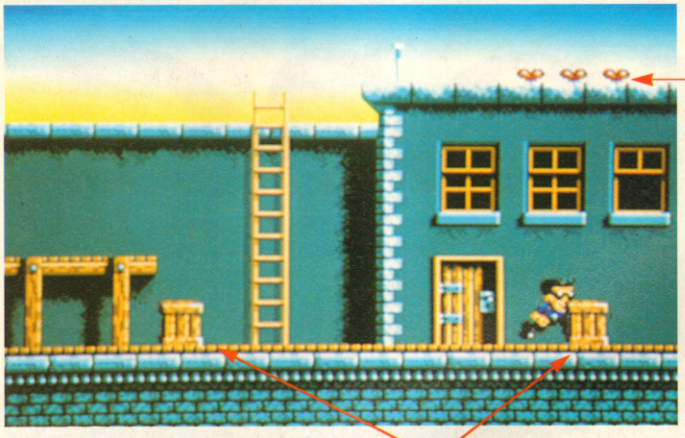


This route, which requires some more Hawk-climbing, leads to extra hearts and bonuses - but only if the player wants to risk collecting them.

Wall-mounted nozzles spurt fire at regular intervals - their pattern must be learned if Hawkins is to get through unsinged.



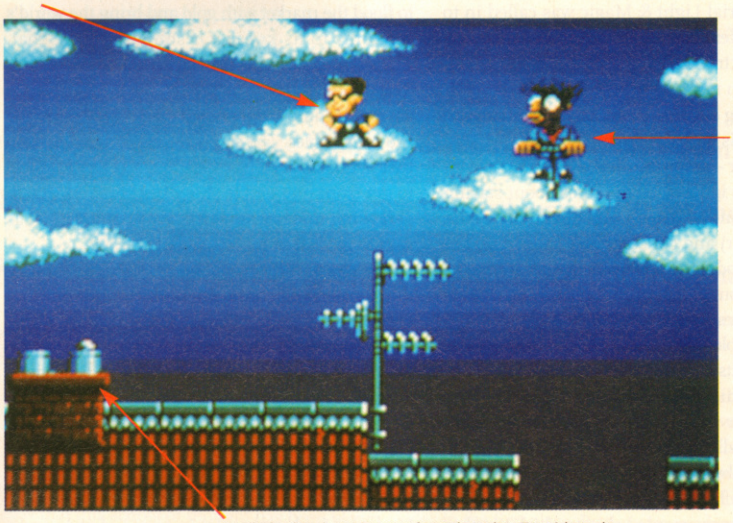
Two types of switches here - the red SHUT switch is used to open the door to the left, while the two OFF buttons indicate that the giant fans are no longer a problem.



Energy-giving hearts are just some of the varied pick-ups available, including money bags, which act as restart points for when Hawkins dies, and little alarm clocks that boost the stage's time limit.

The player must make sensible use of these movable crates, stacking them so as to allow access to the open window above.

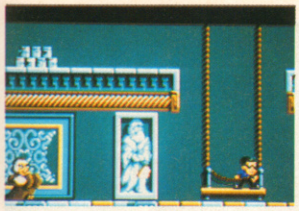
When there are no obvious platforms available, Hawkins can make use of less traditional methods of travel - these clouds provide a pathway right across the sky.

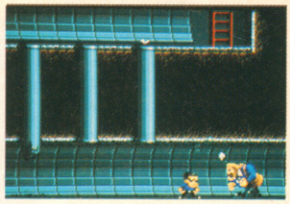


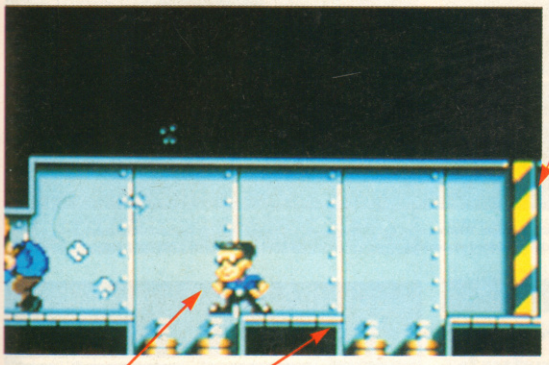
The pogo-sticking gollywog should be disposed of quickly before he becomes too much trouble.

Deadly electricity doesn't just come from pylons - these TV aerials are also lethal to the touch.

**Hudson Hawk does a splendid job of capturing the feel of almost every type of platform game by varying the style of play from stage to stage - one minute the player is leaping from rooftop to rooftop, the next he's involved in a frantic race against time or contemplating some devious trap set-up.**





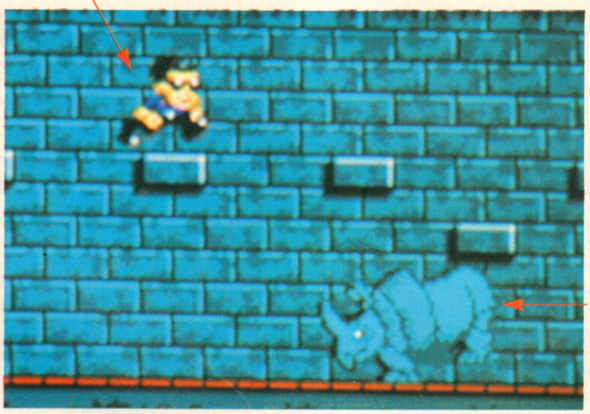


Doors like these are opened by the hitting of a switch, but stay open for only a few seconds before they slide shut again. Speed is of the essence.

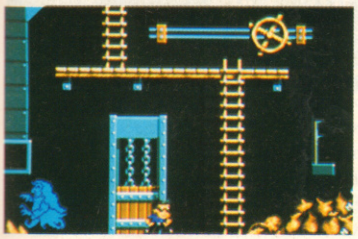
The second-level subgame involves navigating this treacherous series of stepping stones set into the wall to reach the Codex at the end. Every time Hawkins falls and touches the floor, the Codex becomes more and more elusive, until eventually it disappears altogether.

The grumpy janitor may look harmless, but he's a tough customer with that broom, and can sweep Hawkins right onto the deadly pylons!

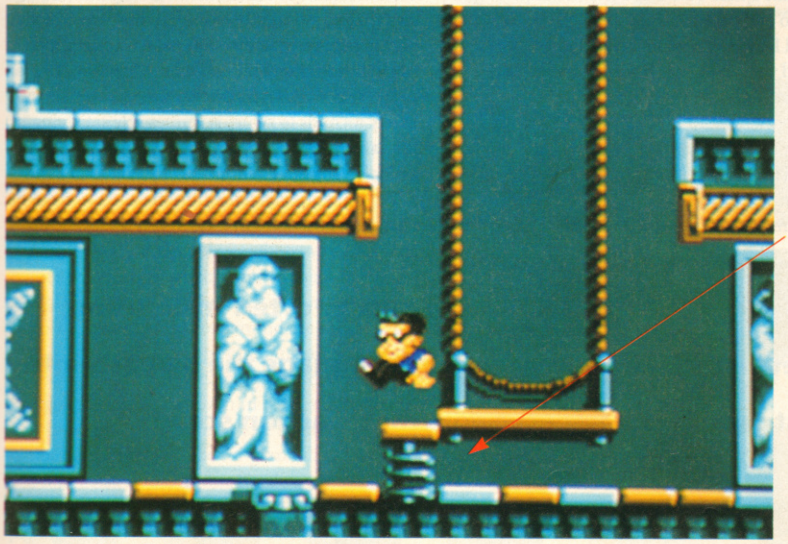
These miniature pylons carry a lethal electric current, requiring pixel-perfect jumps if Hawkins is to avoid being cremated.



One of the game's more bizarre elements, this rampaging rhino (which also appears elsewhere on this level) provides extra incentive to keep off the floor. The lightest touch is fatal.

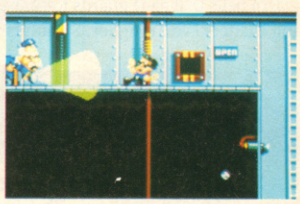


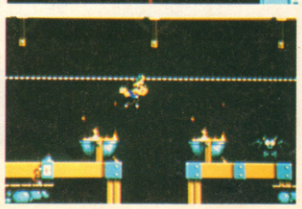
Certain blocks are less reliable than others, sliding in and out of the wall at specified intervals. Careful timing is required to ensure that Hawkins doesn't jump onto a block that isn't there.



These springy panels in the floor are one of the game's dirtiest tricks, bouncing the player back towards the beginning of the stage, meaning it has to be done all over again! A whole series of these little sods must be negotiated without a single mistake in order to reach the Codex room at the end.

Descending into the lower levels of the Vatican complex on Level Two opens up a whole new world of devious surprises, including spike traps that need to be sprung safely using appropriate objects and spike-wielding guards.





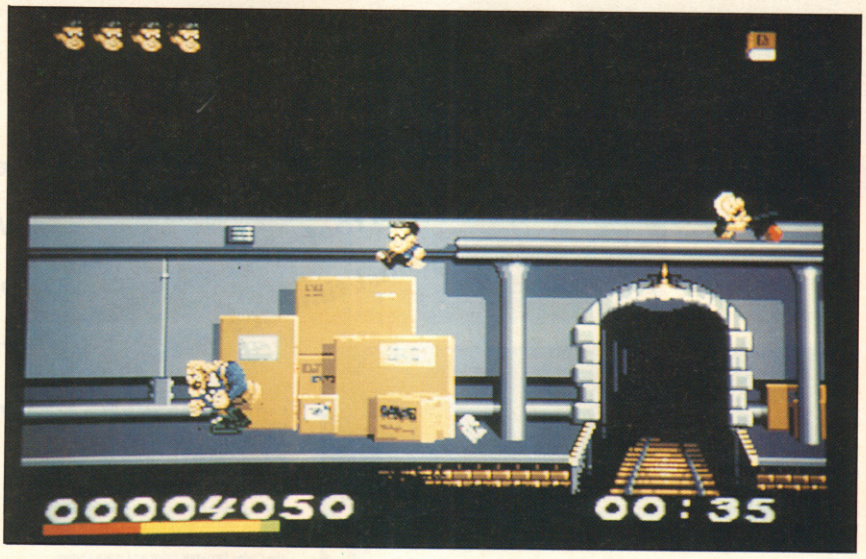
content.In order to pursue its idea of a console-style platform game, Special FX has had to take rather a few liberties with its interpretation of the film. It's difficult, for example, to imagine Bruce Willis as cute, but here in the game he's presented as the sweetest little thing since Bub or Bob - and what's more, he's got plenty of hair. And while the levels are themed to match the relevant movie locations, the majority of supporting characters (ie the baddies) are as far removed from their celluloid counterparts as could possibly be imagined. Gun-toting thugs float by on helium-filled balloons, nuns in the Vatican are impossibly well-endowed, security guards are unbelievably old and doddery, and there are even a few sprites that seem to have been thrown in just for the hell of it, such as a crooning Elvis impersonator (to be fair, though, The King's skeleton does make a short appearance in the movie) and a pogo-sticking gollywog!

While it's these marauding enemies that provide the most immediate threat to the player's wellbeing, it's the landscapes themselves that prove the most perilous. Masonry crumbles, leading to fatal falls, hidden traps and springs push the player from pillar to post with alarming regularity, fast-moving machinery threatens to mash, electric pylons give off deadly electric currents, sprite-roasting fire and slippery oil gush from every orifice. Every stage, especially some of the more puzzle-orientated ones that appear midway, is a masterpiece of fiendishly clever design.

Much of the game's action is fairly simple platform-based stuff, where pixel-perfect jumps and exquisite timing are required to survive. The enemies themselves are pretty harmless individually, but when they attack in force, as is usually the case, things can get very sticky indeed. Again, an effective but unobtrusive link with the film material has gone to provide thoughtful gameplay elements, such as in the first level, where the player must be careful not to come into contact with the various alarm systems that guard the place - tripping a laser beam or being spotted by a roving security camera not only saps energy, but also sounds alarm bells that alert guards to your presence, making matters even tougher. Stealth is the key to success, and while each level has a time limit, it's often worth expending the time to negotiate a particular obstacle in the correct way, rather than rampaging around like a mad bull. The latter technique is guaranteed to end in tears.

Should Hawkins need to defend himself, he comes equipped with an outsize boxing glove for close quarter combat with guards and the like, while an unlimited supply of bouncing baseballs (which were nowhere to be seen in the film, but what the hell?) comes in handy for dispatching foes at longer ranges. They are also invaluable for solving some of the game's more commonplace puzzles, like hitting switches to deactivate dangerous machinery or open doors that lead to later parts of a level. The mastery of control of these weapons, combined with dexterity when it comes to controlling Hawkins in general, is vital if any success is to be had in some of the more torturously-constructed stages. Certain scenes consist of a succession of traps and obstacles that are so tightly designed, the only way the player can squeeze through is by means of pixel-perfect execution and hell-for-leather speed. The result, when such frantic scenes are completed with barely seconds to spare, is immensely satisfying in the same fashion as such skin-of-the-teeth classics as *Rick Dangerous* and *Prince of Persia*.

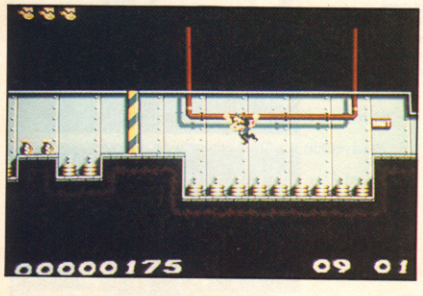
A lot of work has gone into the construction of Hudson Hawk's many stages, and Special FX has



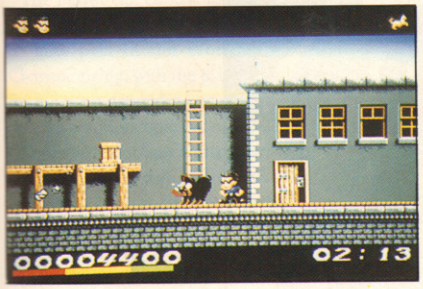

In what is definitely one of the game's most frantic and exciting stages, Hawkins must get from one end of the Vatican's sprawling underground postal system to the other against an excruciatingly tight time limit. Clock icons dotted strategically around provide valuable bonus seconds when collected.

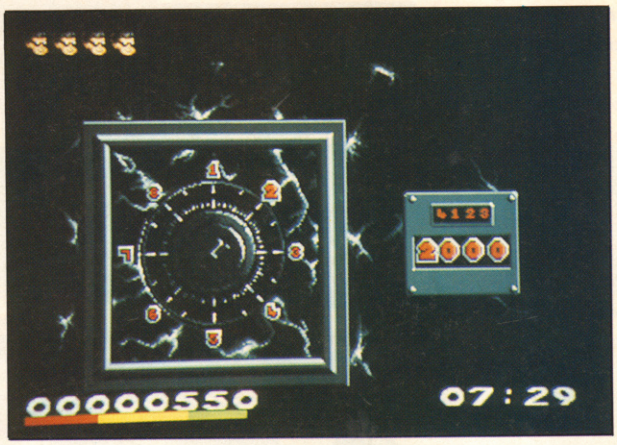
**Amiga version**

**The exquisite console-style graphics are undoubtedly Hudson Hawk's most impressive surface feature, and the music is jolly enough - although the MUSIC OFF key is likely to become a godsend once the same tune has been heard a hundred times over. The use of minimal screen area a la Switchblade on certain sections works fine, and even in the busy full-screen sections there's never any danger of the action slowing down or the silky scrolling losing its footing. It's not exactly pushing the Amiga envelope, but it remains one of the prettiest and most characteristic games on the machine to date.**




**While Hudson Hawk is often infuriating, it's never dull, always managing to engage the player's interest with some wily trap or frantic action scene.**




done a very impressive job of maintaining a playable game while remaining faithful to the source material - not by the usual cop-out means of hackneyed sub-games or cheap graphical gimmicks, but by cleverly working themed elements from the film (such as the alarm systems and rope-climbing) into the levels as real gameplay aspects. On that basis alone it's probably the most effective film tie-in to date, but though the game is expertly put-together, it's arguable that it may be a little too difficult for many platform gamers. Those who found the likes of Rick or Prince too maddening to be enjoyable will surely be put off by Hudson Hawk in precisely the same way, but those who believe that this kind of hard-but-fair philosophy makes the game all the more compulsive will find it to be the most enjoyable experience they've had in a long time. And while it's often infuriating, it's never dull, always managing to engage the player's interest with some wily trap or frantic action scene.

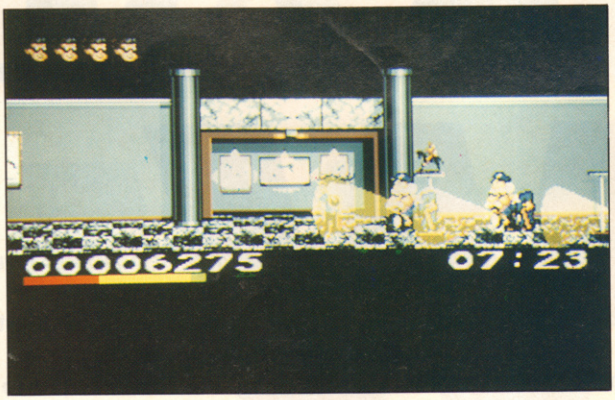
The fun is further bolstered by the gorgeous and amazingly crisp and colourful graphics, which give the game real comic personality and help the whole thing to come alive on screen. Hawkins himself, for example, comes with all the little foibles you'd expect from a cutesy hero - he taps his feet and puts his hands in his pockets if he's left alone for too long (and there's an interesting final effect if the player continues to be neglectful after these warnings), and comes to a stop by waving his arms and skidding along, kicking up little clouds of dust in the process. Even the character's more mundane movements, such as running and rope-climbing are exquisitely animated, and the eye-catching effect this creates just goes to highlight how much nicer other games of this ilk could look if only more attention was paid to the things that we take for granted.

While these minor comic touches impress inidividually, it's Hudson Hawk's overall look that is most pleasing. The characters and backdrops are detailed and colourful without detracting from the overall "cute" feel. As a result the game has a characteristic look all of its own, and Special FX has had much more success in its attempt to create an original and stylish kind of cutesy graphics than the Bitmap Brothers did last month with the mediocre Magic Pockets. It's almost a shame about the Hudson Hawk licence, as the fact that the film bombed so miserably is likely to have a negative effect on the way the software is perceived. But if the punters are willing to cut through all the anti-hype that's been created by the movie (and, to a lesser extent by the low quality of some of Ocean's recent licenced product) and give the game a chance to shine on its own merit, it could well become the next platform sensation. It certainly deserves to.

● **Gary Whitta**

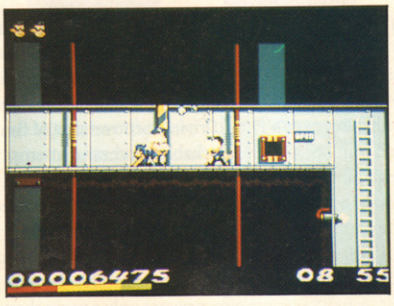
(Above) To successfully steal the Sforza horse statue (above left) , Hawkins must crack the safe in this jolly sub-game at the end of the first level - it's a simple reaction test set against a strict time limit that involves stopping the fast-revolving dial pointer on each of the four combination numbers in sequence.

(Left) Guard dogs cause some of the biggest problems in the game - if a Rottweiller or the smaller sausage dog gets its fangs around Hawkins, it slowly depletes energy until it is shaken off - achieved by furious left-to-right waggling.




(Above) Hawkins' energy is depleted not just by direct contact with enemies, but also by tripping the laser beams which set off alarms, being "seen" by a roving security camera or, as in this case, being illuminated by a guard's torch beam. The expression on Hawkins' face makes it clear he's none too pleased about being spotted. The wall-mounted security cameras can be deactivated for a few moments with a baseball hit, allowing Hawkins to pass unnoticed.

(Left) More surprises for Hawkins as a doddery security guard closes in for the kill.




ACE TrailBlazer

## RATINGS

Gorgeous cutesy console-style graphics.

Deviously-designed traps and levels.

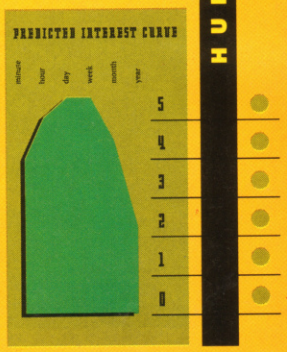
Perhaps too difficult for younger or novice gamers.

### HUDSON HAWK RATINGS

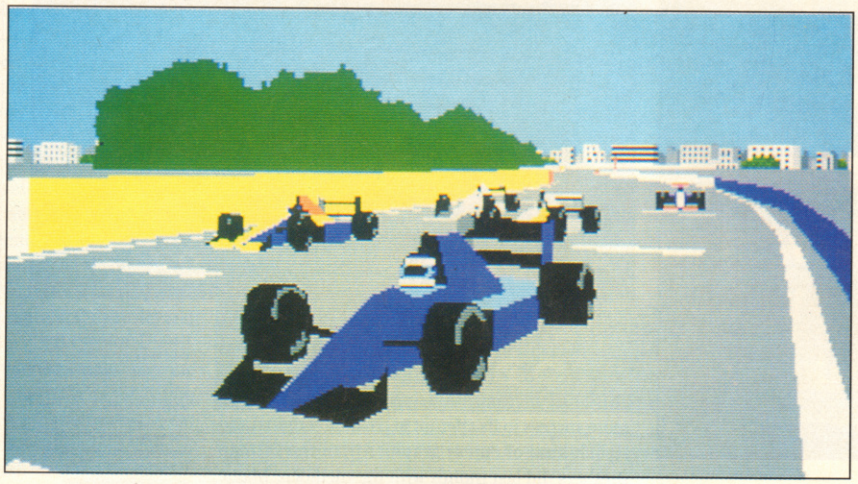
**900 AMIGA RATING**

| G | IQ | A | FF |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 5 | 7 | 9 |

**Initially, it's the colourful, cheerful graphics that draw you in - and hold you there just long enough for the infuriatingly-addictive gameplay to grab on with both hands. It's not likely to let go for a long time either, unless you're one of those lilly-livered gamers who gets fed up after a couple of Game Overs and can't be bothered to persist. Keeping at it is the only way to succeed, as certain sections have to be tried over and over, getting a little further each time until eventually the whole sequence is perfected. While working through familiar territory soon becomes a matter of course, there's something unsettling about reaching a new section never encountered before. With no knowledge of what perils may lie ahead, things can get very tense at times - especially if that dreaded Game Over is only one life away. While at first it seems all too easy to make fatal mistakes, it soon becomes apparent that most deaths are the player's fault rather than the program's, and once that's understood, annoyance gives way to sheer, unadulterated addiction - the sort which is guaranteed to last for quite some time.**



**Genre** Racing Simulation
**Publisher** MicroProse
**Developer** Geoff Crammond
**Price** £TBA



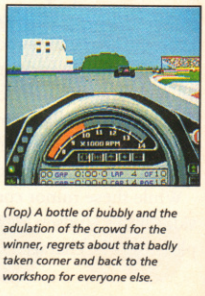
# FORMULA ONE GRAND

**Why are there so few racing simulations around? Given that the games-buying public seem insatiably hungry for arcade-style racers and polygon-driven simulations of anything from tanks to jets to helicopters to submarines to - Heaven forbid! - space shuttles, this deficit seems a little odd.**

That said, many of the brave few who have entered this select arena have achieved more than admirable results. Domark's *Hard Drivin'*, a conversion of the Atari coin-op, was a remarkably successful attempt at the genre, marred only by the sheer physical impossibility of comfortably translating the complete controls of a car, an automatic car admittedly, onto a standard joystick.

Electronic Arts' *Indianapolis 500*, currently the ACE Benchmark for this genre, was not only a more than adequate simulation but enormous fun into the bargain, especially for those with a particular (and peculiar) fondness for seeing flesh ground violently against metal.

Geoff Crammond, Grand Prix's author, is no stranger to racing simulations. Way back in the Dawn of Gaming, when the BBC Model B was considered the machine to aspire to, he produced *Revs*, a sort of proto-Grand Prix. Although undoubtedly an accurate simulation, it was perhaps a little too accurate,



*(Top) A bottle of bubbly and the adulation of the crowd for the winner, regrets about that badly taken corner and back to the workshop for everyone else.*

with many players finding the car near impossible to control.

With Grand Prix the lessons of *Revs* have been well and truly learned and the result is the most visually exciting, involving and - more importantly - playable racing simulation yet available. It's a reproduction of the whole Grand Prix experience, complete with all sixteen tracks and twenty-six drivers. In terms of atmosphere and authenticity, it's the nearest most are ever going to get to reality without donning helmet and gloves.

The player can choose to race in either the World Championship and compete for personal glory, or take part in the World Constructor's Championship, with the player earning points for his team depending on his finishing position. In addition, options are available to allow the player to practice either with or without other drivers on any of the tracks.

Practice is essential not only for the obvious yet much-needed experience of each tracks' torturous twists and turns, but also to help in deciding how best to fine tune the car's performance parameters. In the workshop the player has almost unlimited control over the car's variables, right down to adjusting the car's gear ratios and downforce. Admittedly the novice is likely to skip past all this nuts n' bolts stuff and get onto the tarmac, but experienced players will find that thoughtful use of this facility is essential for shaving those vital seconds off lap times.

Each Grand Prix race consists of a qualifying lap to ascertain the player's position on the starting grid and then the race itself. "True' races last two hours or two-hundred laps, which ever is the sooner, and thankfully it has been realised that such a marathon would test even the most ardent driving freak's endurance to breaking point (as well as being as good test of the quality of their joystick). Thus there's an option to play a percentage of a full race. For example, if the player selects 10% and normally 160 laps are driven in two hours, then the player will race just 16 laps.

But what of the the meat of the game, the actual racing itself? Put simply, it's sensational. No other game comes as close to emulating the sights and sounds of the real Grand Prix. The action is depicted in a unique and effective mixture of bitmapped images and polygons. And although it seems that every time a new polygon-driven game appears the statement's made that the graphics are "fast and smooth", here it really is true. Some effects achieved, such as the seemingly curved polygons used on the bends, make the speed even more astonishing.

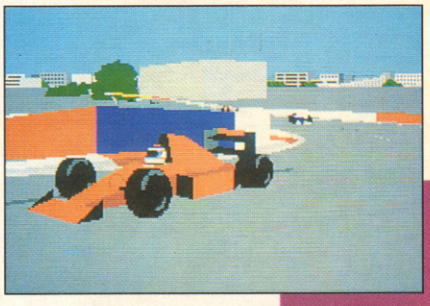
The level of detail is remarkable to say the least. Each car has its own colour scheme matching those of its 'real life' counterpart, complete with the driver's helmet poking up out of the cockpit. The tracks are accurate bordering on the pedantic, with every hill, dip, tilt, sign, building and tree reproduced in the precise locations that they would be found in reality.

Compare & Contrast

**Hail the new Racing Simulation ACE Benchmark. Apart from the out-of-cockpit views, Formula One Grand Prix outshines *Indianapolis 500* in almost every respect. In terms of being a simulation they are closely matched, though Grand Prix's strict though never cloying attention to detail wins out overall. But where Grand Prix really scores is in atmosphere and variety. Although *Indy 500* is superb, one is always aware that it's a game and it can never completely absorb the player's attention to the same extent as Grand Prix. Also, Indy 500's single oval track soon became painfully boring - no such problems with Grand Prix's sixteen.**

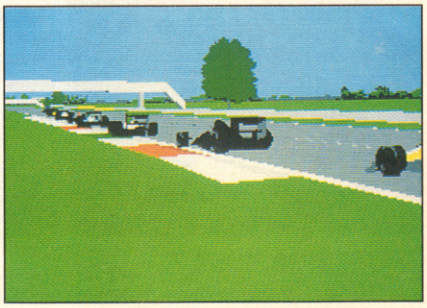
**Particularly excellent, and present only in Grand Prix is the computer-aided driving which both instructs novice drivers and helps experts perfect their technique.**

**The only possible gripe is that some mobile camera angles would have been a nice touch. Otherwise, flawless.**



# PRIX

**With Grand Prix the lessons of *Revs* have been well and truly learned and the result is the most visually exciting, involving and - more importantly - playable racing simulation yet available.**



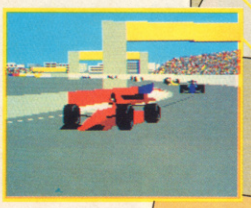
# FORMULA ONE

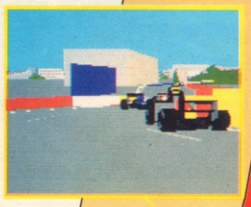
Ste Devote corner approaches. Not too much of a problem normally, but at the crowded start it can be a nightmare.

## START!

Right here in front of the main stand is where the Monaco Grand Prix starts. Get ready for the ride of your life!

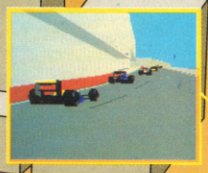
Races last two hours - plenty of time to work your way to the front. Only try to get through the crowded pack if a good (i.e. safe) opportunity arises.



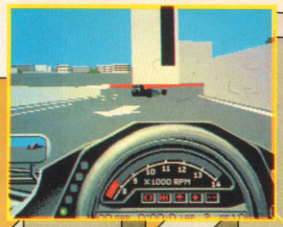


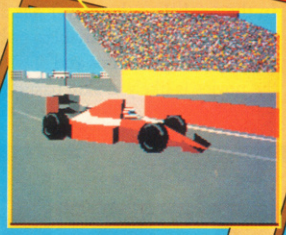
Still bunched together, the competitors approach the completion of one lap.

(Right) Coming out of this corner, the player can see the Casino to his right.



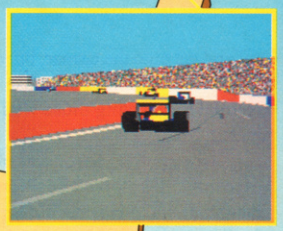
Flying past at 170m.p.h. in sixth you'll probably not get too much chance to see the famous Roses Bar here.





All of Monaco's real features have been reproduced, so if there's a stand on a corner (as here) you'll see it in the game.

'TV cameras' follow the player's progress, passing the view down the line as the player recedes into the distance.



## PIT STOP!

This is the pits! Expectant bitmapped engineers await the arrival of the drivers

Pit stops are controlled by the computer - the player just has to drive in. Best advice? Know where the entrance is!

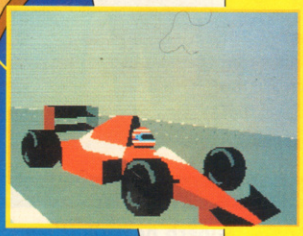
La Rascasse is a fairly new corner introduced in 1973. Of course, this is of little importance to most drivers to whom it will simply be a blur in their peripheral vision.

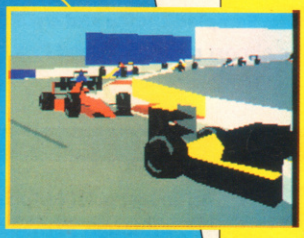
Learn where the straights are - their wise use is the key to Grand Prix success. Coming out of the bend move up the gears as soon as possible, making good use of this golden opportunity to overtake cars.

Slipstreaming is the old driver's trick of using the vacuum left in the wake of the car ahead to rapidly accelerate and (hopefully) overtake. It's been reproduced in Grand Prix, so use it!

Attempting to overtake on a corner, especially one as crowded as this, is tricky and a job for experts.

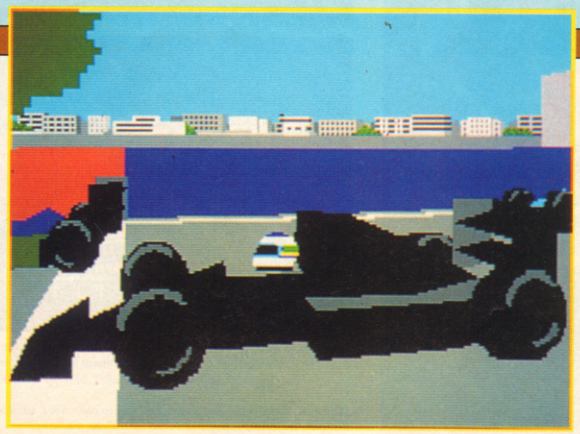
The same rules of cornering apply in Grand Prix as they do to driving on any normal road - slow in, fast out. Approaching the corner, move to the outside of the straight to decrease the severity of the bend. Kill the speed, moving down to second or first gear as necessary. Then, coming out of the corner, accelerate away.

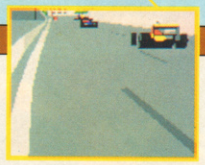




This far north-eastern corner of the track is pretty torturous, being a series of bends and especially tight corners. Handle with care!

**Grand Prix combines rigorous simulation of reality with a host of difficulty modifiers to make it a highly playable game for anyone from Granny to Sterling Moss.**





Grey skidmarks left by the screeching cars help convey an excellent sense of movement and speed.

## ON THE RIGHT TRACK

***Grand Prix features sixteen tracks in all. Below is some advice for six of them***

**CIRCUIT DE MONACO, MONACO**

(shown left): The car should be set up for as much ground-hogging downforce as possible to cope with the track's many tight corners. Qualifying is of paramount importance because the narrow winding streets make it near impossible to overtake unless the opposition make a mistake or crash - although at Monaco the two are usually synonymous.

**SUZUKA, JAPAN**

This is only figure-of-eight track in the racing calendar. It's highly demanding mechanically because of its many tight bends. Cars should be set for medium to low downforce to take advantage of the two long straights.

**PHOENIX, USA**

This is the first race of the season. Based around the streets of the city, the bends are mainly of the ninety -degree variety, although the designers have tried to introduce some more varied corners to prevent driver boredom. Like Monaco, this an exciting course because the narrow track demands greater skill of the driver, especially when trying to overtake.

**MEXICO CITY, MEXICO**

This track features an incredibly long straight that can see cars reaching speeds as high as 190m.p.h. It's easy to get lost because the corners are all very similar. Due to constant resurfacing the track surface is extremely bumpy.

**HOCHENHEIMRING, GERMANY**

The downforce should be completely turned down to take advantage of the track's many long straights. This makes the car a very twitchy and nervous one to drive. It's difficult to finf rhythm on this track, and the straights can result in the driving losing concentration, so stay frosty.

71▶ As a simulation, Grand Prix is impeccable. It lacks in no respect. For example, crashed cars don't just disappear; green-overalled stewards appear and push the car off-track, then a crane hoists it out of harm's way. Likewise, when the player drives into the pits the screen doesn't cut to some animated picture of a pit crew at work, the player actually drives past the pit lanes, each with its own waiting pit crew.

The important thing to point out is that this detail isn't just a frill - it's essential in generating atmosphere. While there is the facility to decrease the detail levels for slightly smoother play, I feel that most players will prefer to keep the detail level high.

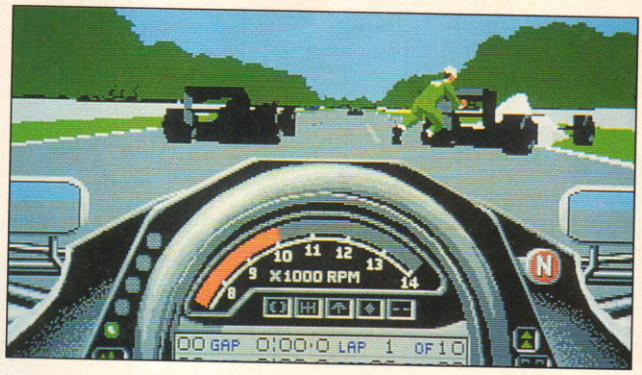
All control is from the joystick. Pushing left and right steers the car, while up and down act as accelerator and brake respectively. The player moves up or down the gears by hitting fire when accelerating or braking. It's a sensible and very workable arrangement, but it does take a little time to get used to, especially if one is more used to arcade-style racing games - no longer can the player perform the old *OutRun* trick of rapid braking even when accelerating by slipping into Low gear.

The control is always astonishingly smooth and responsive - the player never finds himself crashing or over-steering in the wrong direction because he's trying to compensate for sluggish control response, even on the rare occasions when update slows due to a huge amount of on-screen action.

The Formula One car is a tricky brute to drive, and certainly no task for someone whose nearest Grand Prix experience is tootling down to the pub in the family mini. Fortunately *Revs*-like frustration is averted by a number of driving 'aids' (see the 'Help Me!' box for a full - ahem - run-down). Each makes the task of taming the car that bit easier. Indeed, with all the aids active there's little left to do but steer left and right. However, those thinking that they provide an easy route to Championship success are sadly mistaken - the computer switches them out as the player progresses through the tracks.

Each of the player's driving opponents has been modelled with their own - for the want of a better term - 'personalities'. It's not surprising to be pulling

*It's the little details that add so much to Grand Prix (though I'm sure Geoff Crammond found they were not such a little task to program in). These track stewards, for example. Rather than a crashed car just disappearing or driving itself off-track, green-suited stewards appear and push the stricken vehicle towards the waiting cranes which hoist it away and out of danger. There's a similar and even more effective use of 'people' graphics in the Pits seqeunces.*

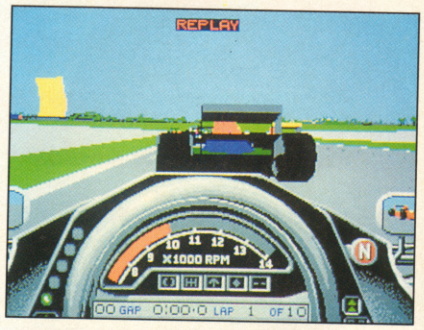



## Amiga version

**Superb near-digitised-quality intro and menu screens give way to literally marvellous 3D - the poor old Amiga must be sweating its guts out to achieve the screen update on show here. Sampled engine and crowd sounds help accentuate the almost palpable Grand Prix atmosphere.**

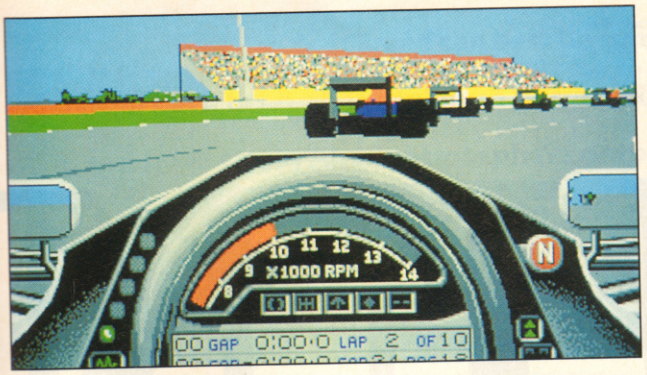
## Atari ST version

**An almost pixel-for-pixel copy of its Amiga partner. Although perhaps a small yet impressive tad faster in places, the ST loses out inevitably in the sound stakes, with the engine's tinny whine a poor substitute for the Amiga's throaty roar.**



*(Top) The inredibly-animated man with the yellow flag waves the cars off. Grand Prix's combination of polygons and bitmaps is stunningly effective.*

*(Above) In Phoenix the evergreens give way to palm trees, all sited in exactly the same locations as they'd be found on the real track*




(Left) The roar of the crowd builds as the player approaches the multi-coloured throng packing out the grandstands. With the cars ahead packed together in a tight bunch, overtaking isn't going to be easy.

(Below) Race over, the driver climbs out of the cockpit.

**Formula One Grand Prix isn't so much leading the pack as lapping it.**

away from the starting grid and in the distance see four or five cars getting involved in a rather nasty metal-rending pile-up. This incompetence on the part of the computer-controlled cars makes a refreshing change for the usual 'follow-the-best-line' perfect driving seen in other racing games - even if it did have to be programmed in! Not only does this provide a real challenge - these guys don't weave about in boringly predictable patterns - it also helps enhance that all-important sense of atmosphere. It's easy to start believing that those are real people out there on the track.

As is seemingly standard in today's simulations, Grand Prix features several alternatives to the standard first-person cockpit view. The player can 'scroll' backwards and forwards through the different cars to see the current view from their cockpits. At first, this may not sound useful, but it in fact turns out to be handy for finding out where, say, the leader or the car immediately behind are. While doing this, the computer maintains steady though definitely not race-winning control over the car, making sure it doesn't crash or come off the track.

In addition, there's a TV-style view from a series of cameras mounted on the trackside, each of which pan to follow the player's car as it passes. Unfortunately there's no zoom facility, the player simply has to make do with what's available. It's a real pity that there aren't more views available, such as the helicopter shot in *Indianapolis 500*.

At the risk of sounding like an over-enthusiastic boy racer, it has to be said that Grand Prix is so perfect that it truly is hard to find any criticism. One may carp about the lack of out-of-cockpit views, but then again how many real Formula One drivers have such an option? A triumph of both programming and design, Formula One Grand Prix isn't so much leading the pack as lapping it.

● **David Upchurch**

## Help Me!

***Even if the player thinks that gear stick is abuse from their mates about the clothes they wear, Grand Prix's five driving aids should get them around the track in one piece.***

**Automatic braking - The computer controls the player's braking. The computer assesses the player's speed and their position on the track and decides whether braking is necessary. It makes winning very difficult, because it's conservative braking conspires to stop the player over-taking, especially on corners. Useful at first, but soon de-selected.**

**Automatic Gearing - Very handy. Lets the player forget about all that up-fire/back-fire malarkey and just get on with the winning. But don't forget that the computer switches all these aids out eventually, so the gear switching has to learnt someday.**

**Direction Pointer - There are few things scarier than driving along at 200 m.p.h. and seeing a pack of similarly speedy vehicles coming directly head-on. Thank goodness, then, for this aid which always forces the car to drive the right way around the track.**

**Indestructability - The Grand Prix world is a rough and tumble one, especially when the player's starting out. Fortunately this nifty option that makes the player's car as hard as nails and totally impervious to any damage.**

**Best Line - Although ideally the player learns by experience where best to position his car to take maximum advantage of every corner, it does take some time. This option draws a line on the road indicating the optimum path to take around the track.**

ACE trailBlazer

ACE GRAPHICS

## RATINGS

Superbly detailed, fast and atmospheric 3D. Rigorous technical accuracy. Multiple difficulty settings and player aids.

Only one limited out-of-cockpit view.

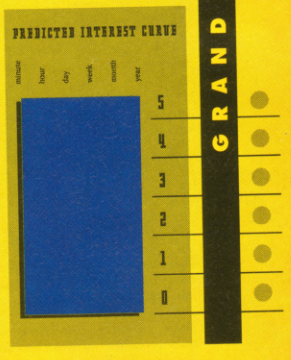
**930** AMIGA RATING

G 10 IQ 6 A 8 FF 10

**930** ST RATING

G 10 IQ 6 A 8 FF 10

**The PIC Curve says it all - a high-flying flatliner. Nobody could fail to be less than astounded by the presentation and the 3D graphics, and these initial impressions of excellence are then replaced by enthusiasm for the actual game itself. The wealth of driving aids mean that anyone from Sterling Moss to Granny Smith can find a difficulty level to their liking, and challenges don't come much greater than winning the Grand Prix. Add the return incentive of beating lap times and you have a game that'll never lose its appeal.**




GRAND PRIX RATINGS

**Genre** Arcade Blast
**Publisher** Team 17
**Developer** In-house
**Price** £24.99

# ALIEN BREED

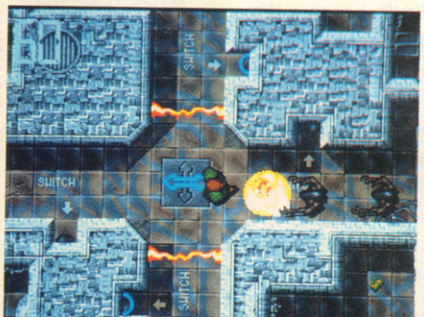
**What is it about the Alien that makes it so crowd-pleasingly scary? Is it the creature's utter implacability - the fact that it can't be bargained or reasoned with? Or is it the sinister abcence of eyes, which imply that no matter how hard you try to hide it will somehow track you down? Or the** hideous way it uses still-living humans as fleshy incubators for its young? Whatever the reasons, there can be no doubt that the Alien is the most popular monster in modern cinema.

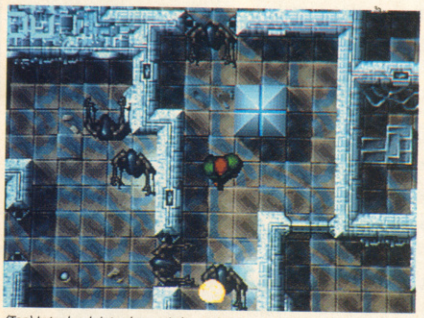
There have been attempts to cash in on the Alien's money-spinning qualities before. Now-defunct Argus made a creditable job of translating the first film's suspense/horror atmosphere (and even Jones the cat!) across onto computer, while Electric Dreams produced not one but two (count 'em) games based on the gung-ho sequel *Aliens*, one written in the US and the other produced right here in dear old Blighty. Patriotism aside, the UK interpretation, an exploration game cum shoot-'em-up, was far superior to the six feeble mini-games affair of the American effort. And even as I write, Mirrorsoft are putting the finishing touches on another game to tie-in with the release of the second *Alien* sequel early next year.

Apart from official tie-ins, there have been many other games that have 'borrowed' - some might say plagiarised - the Alien's biomechanical imagery to add extra 'Oomph!' to the gameplay. Be honest, doesn't the close resemblance between *R-Type*'s end-of-level baddy and the Alien add a certain thrill to the otherwise standard shoot-'em-up task of blasting seven bells out of the enemy?

And now we have Alien Breed, the first full-price title from demo writers cum game creators Team 17. Alien Breed can best be summed up as the *Aliens* licence that should have been. It not so much borrows from the film as completely mugs it, but by grafting Aliens atmosphere onto *Gauntlet*-esque gameplay, Team 17 have come up with an addictive - albeit unoriginal - winner.

But at a price. Alien Breed is a game for Amiga owners only, and one megabyte machines at that. This rather lofty stance isn't quite as elitist as it first appears, considering that all new Amigas come



*(Top) Later levels introduce switch-toggled forcefields. The trick is to shoot the switch and open up new passages without getting fried in the process. Not easy.*

*(Above) As the player progresses down through the decks, the surroundings become more and more battle-scarred and coverd in alien remains.*

**Alien Breed can best be summed up as the *Aliens* licence that should have been. It not so much borrows from the film as completely mugs it, but by grafting Aliens atmosphere onto *Gauntlet*-esque gameplay, Team 17 have come up with an addictive - albeit unoriginal - winner.**

equipped with the extra 512K as standard and upgrades are retailing from as little as thirty quid from certain third-party manufacturers.

The leeching off Alien extends right down to the plot, which is perfunctory verging on negligible. A space station has suddenly ceased communications with base. And it's up to the one or two players, as the Universe's hardest muscles-for-brains space troopers, to investigate and find out why. No prizes for guessing that the answer is fanged, carnivorous and hungry for humans.

The game is split into six stages, one for each deck of the space station. Before entering the deck the player is given a task to complete before access to the deck lift is permitted. On the first level the task is simple - just find the lift - but later on they become just slightly more complex, and inevitably result in the activation of the deck's self-destruct sequence and a hair-raising rush to escape before the place blows and the player with it. These tasks, though hardly brain teasing, at least add momentum to the game and avoid the problem that plagued *Gauntlet*, i.e. apart from getting higher scores there was no real point to playing.

The action is depicted in plan view. As the players move about the view scrolls smoothly in all directions to follow their progress. The graphics are generally excellent, with the beautifully detailed and well-animated decks being especially noteworthy, the scattered tools and items on the floor perfectly conveying the sense of somewhere left in a hurry. In comparison the sprites are a great disappoint, especially those of the players, and the animation is merely adequate - the players' 'shoulder-pad shuffle' is particularly poor.

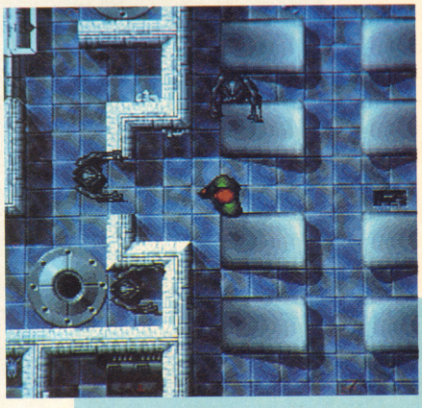
The aliens attack from all sides, some wandering in from off-screen, others bursting up through holes in the floor or crawling out through vents in the walls. The assault is nightmarishly relentless - unlike *Gauntlet* there are no 'generators' for the player to destroy and stop the onslaught. Apart from the giant 'end-of-level' monsters that appear from Deck Three onwards, there are fundamentally only two types of xenomorph - man-sized and weaker face-hugger-sized - and it's really only their appearances and strengths that alter as the player progresses. It's a pity that there wasn't more variety to the aliens, such as an alien that, say, spat acid at the player. The attack patterns never change either - the aliens either dawdle around or make a bee-line for their quarry, depending on how they feel.

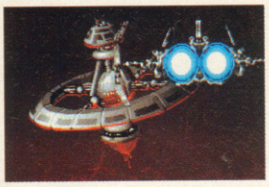
The decks are more than just a network of corridors and doors. There are various things to interact with or avoid, such as turbines that try to suck the player in and turn him into mincemeat, or force-fields which can only be passed through one-way. Tactically the most important are the fire doors, which can be closed by shooting the switch nearby. However, care must be taken not to seal off important deck areas. These features add a terrific amount to the game, forcing the player to tread carefully and plan his route through the deck. The fire doors in particular cause a surprising amount of sweaty tension, as the low-energy player desperately fumbles to seal a corridor before the aliens reach him.

Without the most frequently-used deck feature is the Intex Systems computer, from which the player can access a series of menus

**Compare & Contrast**

**Alien Breed owes a lot to Aliens, but even more to Gauntlet. This Atari coin-op appeared in 1985, and boasted simultaneous four-player action as wizards and warriors fought hordes of freaks and ghouls in a dungeon-based quest for treasure. Alien Breed lacks many of Gauntlet's best qualities, such as the wide variety of opponents and the differing abilities of the characters, but more than replaces them with complex and more interactive maze layouts and greater atmosphere. Most importantly, Alien Breed's defined aims and the certain knowledge that it has an end help give the game a sense of purpose that Gauntlet lacked.**





*Tobias Richter has been wowing Amiga owners everywhere for some time now with his stunning Star Trek animations. Team 17 made the wise move of signing him up to produce an intro for Alien Breed, and the result is truly stunning - far superior to the similar intros Psygnosis use to front their products.*

*(Top) A lone starship warps through the inky void. On board are two of the Galaxy's hardest hardmen - men so tough that they sleep naked on barbed wire and cut their stubble with a purposely-blunted machete. But even they may not be able to handle what lies ahead...*

*(Right top) Ahead lies their destination - and their destiny. As the ship is brought in to dock by the computer, the troopers scan the mute station for any sign of inhabitation. Nothing. The whole place seems dead. Nowhere is there any indication of the screaming horror that awaits them.*

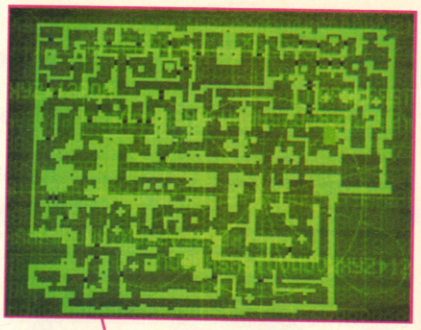
*(Right middle and bottom) The ship fires its reverse thrusters to kill its velocity and gently comes to rest in the station's main hangar. Welcome to Hell, gentlemen...*

*Gauntlet* veterans will be pleased to hear that a lot of their old dungeon-bashing skills will come in handy here, such as using doorways for cover to fire at the aliens. The aliens are generally much slower than the player (although some can show a very clean pair of heels) so if feeling weak flee rather than fight.

Money, money, money. Green Credit bars have been liberally scattered on the deck floors by the deceased occupants, and can be picked up by the unscrupulous Space Troopers and used to buy equipment and supplies from the Intex computer. Like money always does it causes endless squabbles between friends as they fight to grab the lion's share.

Key. Very useful. Can be found lying on the floor or bought in six packs from the Intex computer. Often a wise move to keep an eye on how many keys you possess to avoid possible game-ending scenarios as getting stuck in a room with no way out.

Get to know what these look like well - you'll be using them alot. They're Intex computer terminals, the station's very own data network. Most importantly it can be used to buy items using the Credits found on deck, access play stats and (as here, right) bring up a map of the current level. (And bear in mind that the illustration below represents just one-half of the complete Deck One, which in turn is the smallest deck in the game.)



Doorways are one of the game's most problem-causing features. The player is just starting to make some headway when - wouldn't ya know it - he runs out of keys, entailing much back-tracking as the player fantically searches the deck for one.

Use the Intex Map to plan your route carefully using the minimum number of keys. But bear in mind that sometimes seemingly pointless detours can often yield high rewards.

The deck floor rises and falls, often entailing much frantic scrambling as the player attempts to get out of a pit full of aliens, like the one shown here.

The deck lift. Humble it may seem but on the self-destructing levels, with the alert klaxxon ringing in the player's ears, it's one of the most welcome sights in the game.

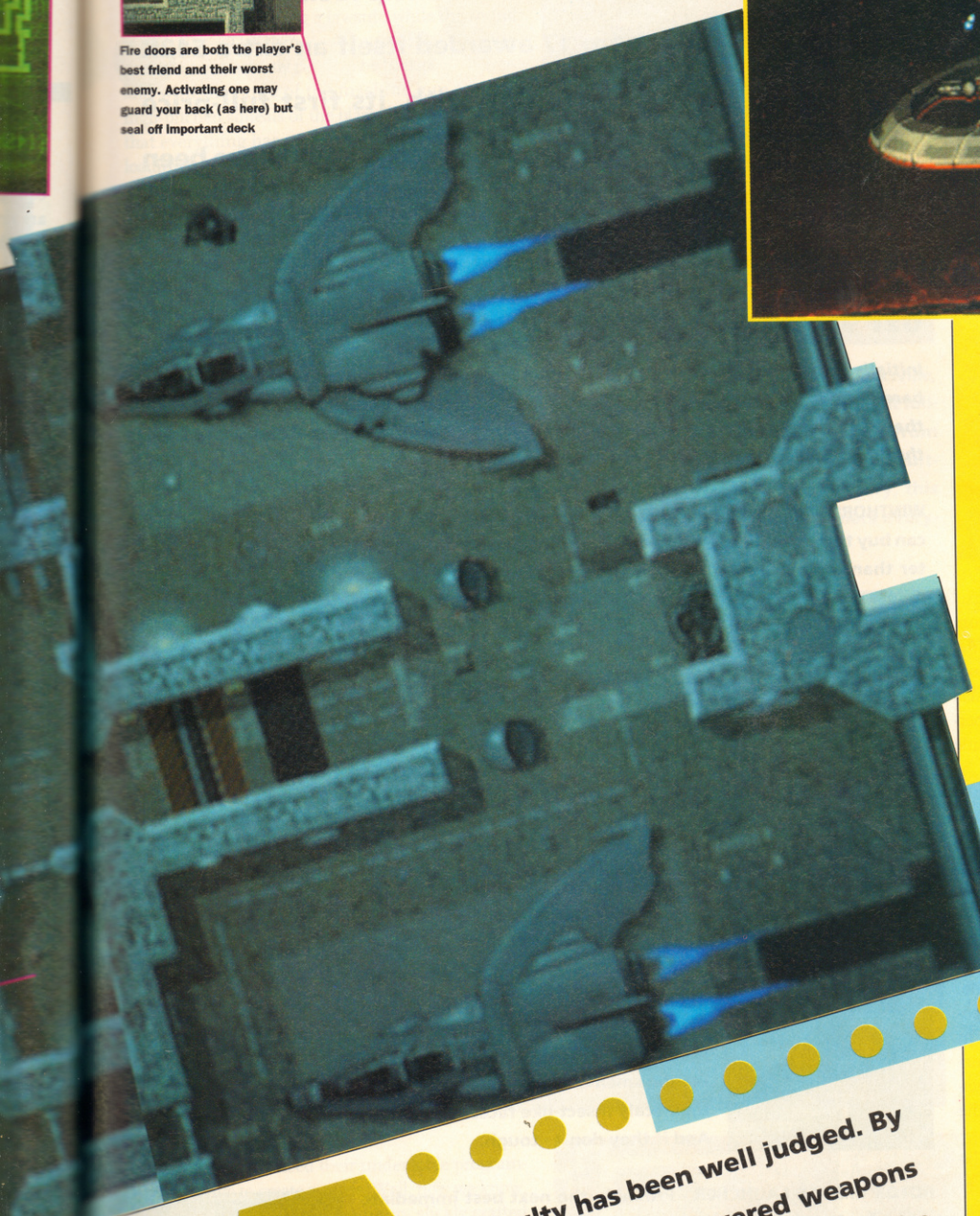
When desperately seeking the lift, don't panic and get lost. Check the Intex Map (time stands still while this happens) if you're unsure where to go.

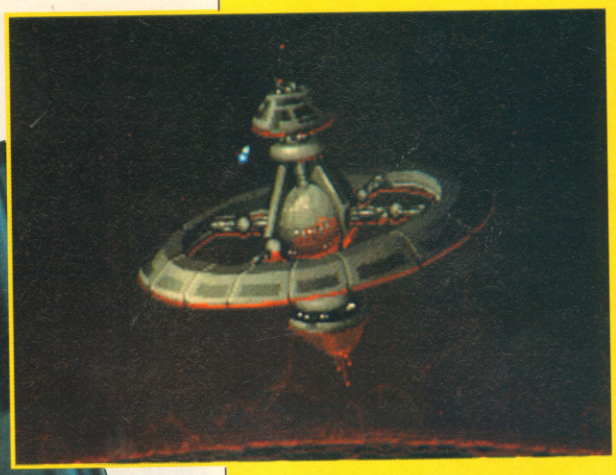
Lock n' load. Ammo cases are among the rarer items left behind by the station staff, and so random firing should be kept to a minimum. Even rarer are first-aid kits which replenish the player's health and smiley-faced extra life tokens.

Although large, the decks (well, the first ones at least) are fairly easy to navigate around thanks to arrows indicating the direction of lifts and a computer voice telling you when you've entered a new zone.

Fire doors are both the player's best friend and their worst enemy. Activating one may guard your back (as here) but seal off important deck

Avoid. These jet exhausts cause - not unsurprisingly - instant death. It also slays the aliens, so if possible try and lure them into the blast. However, doing so is a little tricky - the aliens aren't completely stupid - so don't waste too much time on it.





## FULL DECK

Alien Breed takes the player through six deadly levels. But what does the player have to do on each, and what can he expect to meat... er... meet? Read on...

DECK ONE: Having just landed in the ship's hangar, the player's task is simple - find the lift. Few aliens, so this is a really just a warming-up session for what lies ahead.

DECK TWO: The player must make his way to the station's core computer system. Once this has been reactivated the deck will begin to self-destruct - so get out sharpish. Alien presence begins to increase, with the first appearance of small, quick but mercifully weak face-hugger-sized xenomorphs.

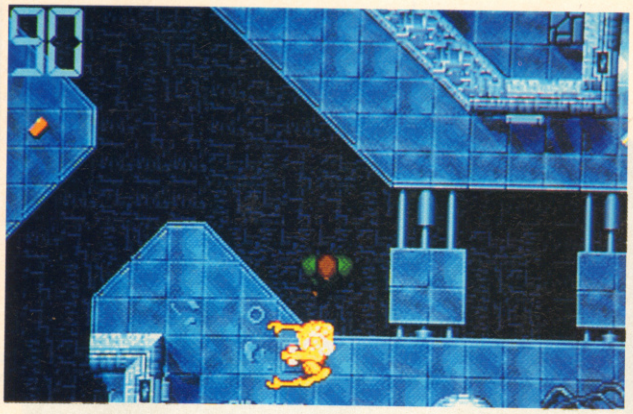
DECK THREE: The station's power regulator has been damaged. The player must find and repair it. Sliding platforms are the only way to cross trenches. More aliens and a giant end-Zone creature to get past.

DECK FOUR: The player has to locate the security vault and recover the station's research data. Player now has to contend with crushing walls and switchable forcefields. As you'd guess, lots more aliens.

DECK FIVE: The End Is Nigh. Find the station's self-destruct, kick it in and get back to the ship as soon as possible. Opening and closing iris valves in the floor mean a careless trooper could fall to his death.

DECK SIX: Disaster! The lift breaks and plummets down to the sixth deck, the alien hatchery. Objective? Escape, preferably alive. Bursting at the seams with very pissed-off aliens. And who knows, if you're lucky you might get a meeting with the Queen...

**Alien Breed's difficulty has been well judged. By matching the player's access to higher-powered weapons with the aliens' strength, Team 17 have ensured that the odds never swing wildly in either's favour.**



**One can't help feeling that, given Team 17 awarded itself an extra 512K to play around with, its first full-price game could and perhaps should have been rather more ambitious than a top-notch Gauntlet clone.**

to buy a more powerful weapon (see the 'Uzi 9mm...' box to find out what's in stock), and anything from an ammo clip to a set of door keys to a new life, using the credits found left lying on the deck floor by the careless deceased station staff. There's also the facility to examine a full deck map, check performance statistics and even have a relaxing game of *Pong!*

Players 'jack in' to the network by walking up to one of the blue-lit terminals and hitting fire. Although it's a good system that prevents the player having to fumble for the keyboard in the heat of battle, the proximity check could have done with a little tweaking. Too often the player finds himself on-line by accident because he happened to be just a tad too close to the terminal when firing his machine gun. The 'logging on' procedure is a little annoying, too. The menu text is spat out letter by letter teletype-fashion, which can make for an annoying break in the action if the player simply wants to check something quickly. But although mildly frustrating, neither of these niggles detract in seriously from the game.

The game's difficulty has been well judged. The decks, though large, are split into 'zones', so the player always knows whether he's heading in the right direction or not. As the player progresses downwards the mazes become more convoluted, the aliens more ferocious and the Intex terminals more scarce. By cleverly matching the player's access to higher-powered weapons with the strength of the opponents, the programmers have ensured that the odds never swing wildly in either the players' or the aliens' favour, and the game provides a constant challenge. Unfortunately there's no password system, and it can get a little dull having to wade through the early levels over and over again.

In terms of recreating the Aliens' claustrophobic

## Uzi 9mm...

***Initially the players are armed with a simple machine-gun. Its pathetic rat-a-tat-tat fire is barely sufficient defence against the first deck's horde, let alone the hard-as-nails brutes that attack later on. Join us as we amble down the aisles of Guns-U-Like , and browse through the juicy selection of xenomorph-stoppers on offer...***

**WINTHORPE PPS TWIN-FIRE EMG - For a paltry 2200Cr the player can buy this rapid-firing little beauty. Although a damn sight better than the machine gun, it's still not that worthy a purchase unless you're really desperate, although it's predictable fire pattern can be a bonus in some situations.**

**AMMET MPP FLAMEBOW THROWER - Powerful but erratic, this spits out fizzing boomerangs of fire that bounce wildy around the corridors and off the walls. Superb for confined spaces, but it's unpredictability can result in disastrous consequences near fire doors. Price? 3100 Cr.**

**INTEX PLASMA SHOTGUN - At 5300 Cr this is probably the best upgrade for the first-time buyer. Each squeeze of the trigger causes a intense wave of blue plasma to sweep out in front of the player. Frying tonight? Oh yes, we most certainly are.**

**INTEX EBON FLAMETHROWER - A real beauty this - looks good, feels good and packs one Hell of a kick, all for only 8800 Cr too. Let the smell of cooked alien fill your nostrils as you wave this in their scaly insect-like faces. You know they love you for it really. And if they don't - tough.**

**ROTOX MISSILE LAUNCHER - Probably the next best immediate upgrade after the Plasma Shotgun at its moderately cheap 11300 Cr, and well worth saving those valuable pennies for. The Launcher's armour-piercing shells make short work of even the hardest alien carapace.**

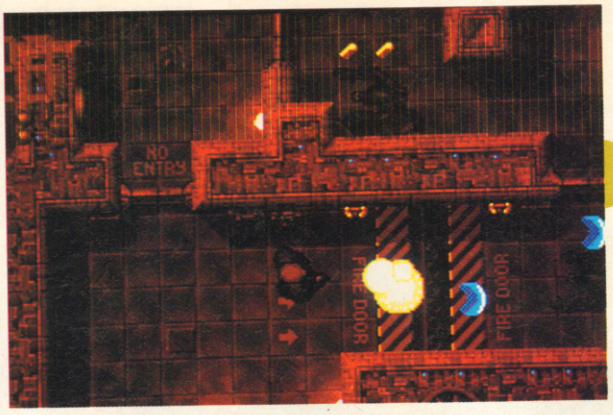
**INTEX ARC LAZER GUN - Costing a hefty 18200 Cr this is by far the most expensive weapon, but by George it's worth it. An essential item in any psychopath's armoury, it emits streams of rippling multi-hued lazer rays, incinerating anything in its path. Almost makes you feel sorry for the ugly little bugs. Almost.**

'one versus a hundred' atmosphere, Alien Breed comes closer than any of the official tie-ins mentioned earlier. The alien graphics are similar enough to their movie counterparts to evoke memories of the film without forcing a lawsuit, while the sound is stu[illegible] The thro[illegible]um of th[illegible]up-port sy[illegible]nstantly p[illegible]he backgr[illegible]ver-laid with the rattle of the machine gun and the high-pitched squeals of the blasted aliens. It seems that everything has an appropriate sample, from loading a new ammo clip to a door opening.

There are constant messages from a 'female computer' voice à la 'Mother', telling the player which zone he's now entering or if he's low on ammo. The best example of the game's superb use of sound occurs when the self-destruct is activated: the life-support hum gradually rises in pitch and tempo as the clock ticks down, while the computer voice intones "Destruction Imminent" with increasing urgency. Admittedly it's an old tension-generating trick, but it still works.

Many have speculated what would happen when demo writers gave up trying to put five-million colours and four-hundred BOBs on screen at one time and actually used their undeniable programming talents to create a game. Well, now we know. Alien Breed is a fine action romp, slickly crafted and possessing sufficient depth to make it rewarding to play. There's plenty of features which I'm pleased to see the team have included and the whole project seems to have had some genuine care and effort put into it. However, one can't help feeling that, since Team 17 awarded itself an extra 512K to play around with, its first full-price game could and perhaps should have been rather more ambitious than a top-notch *Gauntlet* clone.

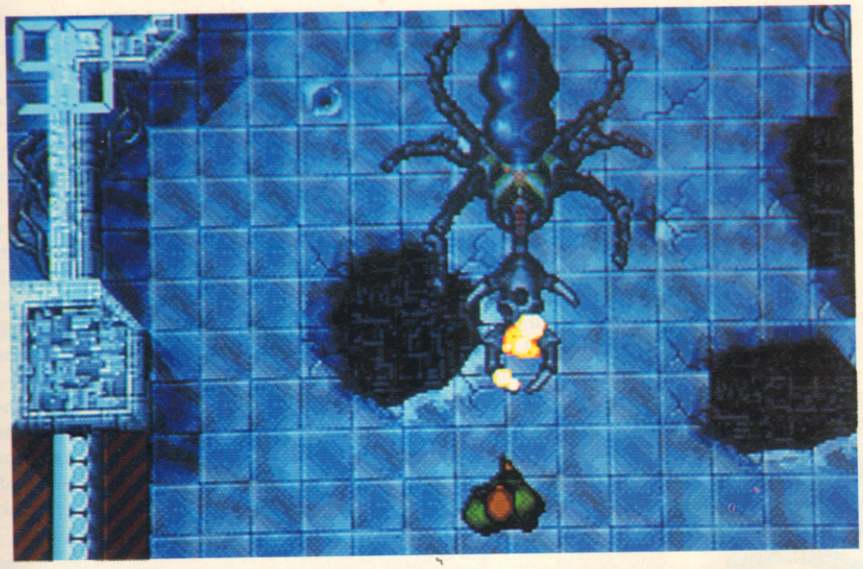
● **David Upchurch**




*(Above) On the second deck the player's task is to reactivate the core computer. All well and good, but this has the unfortunate side effect of setting of the deck's self-destruct sequence. The deck lights switch out, leaving only the murky red of the emergency illumination. A frantic and highly tense race against time ensues, as the player attempts to return to the safety of the deck lift before oblivion.*

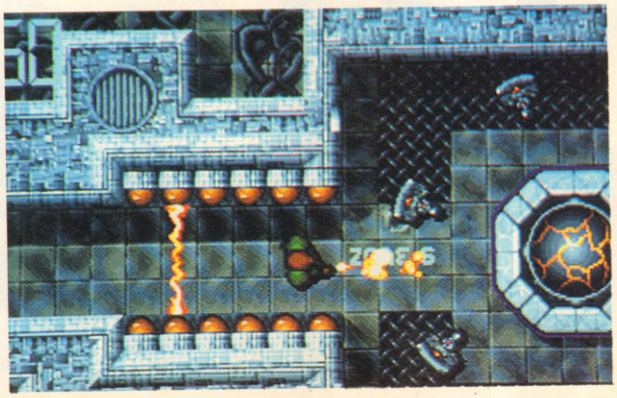
## Amiga version

**Presentation-wise, this is Mr Slick of Slicksville, from the Tobias Richter intro to the fast full-screen scrolling. Everything - apart from the average sprite design and animation - is of a faultlessly high quality. Provided you have the memory, this is an essential purchase for trigger-happy gamers everywhere.**



*(Left) From Deck Three onwards Alien Breed's version of 'end-of-level baddies' appear. The routine is much the same as normal - blast like crazy while avoiding the return attacks.*

*(Below) That core compute mentioned above in all its pre-destruction glory. When the player enters via the alleyway, laser beams appear behind him to seal off the exit. The only option is to shoot like crazy at the blocks rotating about the centre and hope that they explode before the player does. If this occurs then the player only has to touch the core to start the countdown to destruction.*



ACE SOUND

## RATINGS

Fast arcade-quality action with a little depth.

Well-graded difficulty.

Exceptional use of sound adds to tense atmosphere.

Too easy to accidentally 'log on' to computer.

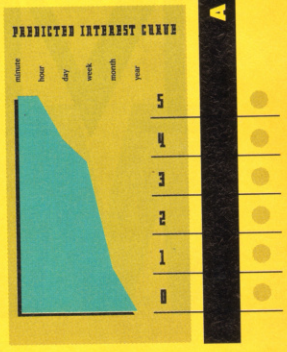
Six levels will soon be completed.

**875** AMIGA RATING

G 9 | IQ 3 | A 10 | FF 9

**The glossy presentation and easy-to-grasp gameplay provide an instant pull. The wise move of giving the player a task for each level gives purpose to the otherwise mindless task of blasting alien after alien, and the introduction of new gameplay features, different-looking aliens and more-powerful weapons on the later decks provides a strong urge to continue. Despite the incredibly-high difficulty of the last levels, it won't take forever to see all six and once this happens it's unlikely to be loaded again.**

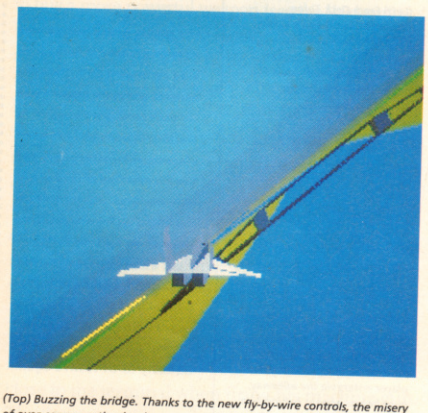
ALIEN BREED RATINGS



**Genre** Simulation
**Publisher** Domark
**Developer** Simis
**Price** £TBA

# MIG 29M SUPER

**Somewhere in South America a coup has taken place. Stinking yellowtoothed rebel forces have taken control, to a greater or lesser extent, of an area some 20,000 kilometres square. United Nations resolution 828 dictates that unless the rebels surrender immediately to Peacekeeping troops,**



*(Top) Buzzing the bridge. Thanks to the new fly-by-wire controls, the misery of over-compensation has been reduced to such a level that the most delicate flying manoeuvres can be achieved.*

*(Above) Note the graduated skyline. Players with slower machines can opt to turn it off for greater speed, but when in action, it does a great deal for the atmosphere.*

the area will have to be reclaimed by force. Needless to say, the rebels pay no heed to threats from silly little pacifists in cyan helmets and stay put, urging the UN to do their worst...

Taking control of the Mig29M, the most feared combat aircraft in the world and pride of the Soviet airforce, the player's mission is to embark on a campaign of strikes, each loosening the rebels' stranglehold on the area and eventually running the enemy filth out of the country.

Distinct from the first MiG game from Domark, released only a year ago, MiG29M is essentially one long mission, broken down into clusters of manageable combat chunks. The aim is to give the feeling of a more coherent campaign, of actually taking part in a war rather than playing a set of practise missions. MiG29M's premise is best described as a midpoint between a Microprose theatre-of-war style affair and the slightly disjointed though more instantly gratifying feel of Interceptor.

If this outing was to succeed, it was vital that while addressing the problems of the short-term and bitty appeal of the first game, the player didn't feel as if he was left adrift without any direction, simply flying across thousands of kilometres of air space with no aim.

The game's success on this count is at least partially down to the limitations put upon the player. By only allowing only four waypoints to be stored in the aircraft's automatic navigation system, it's ensured that there's little chance of the player feeling swamped with options.

Before takeoff, an overview of the Mission screen shows the entire campaign area with bridges, roads and supply depots marked. Four waypoints are already positioned on the map, all of which can be moved around at will. In their initial positions they are, respectively; the home runway, an enemy runway, a road bridge over a river and an enemy supply depot. Although the player can position any waypoint wherever he chooses, it rapidly becomes clear that there is a particular order of strikes which must be performed, each weakening the overall enemy position. Carefree heroism such as trying to destroy the main enemy base on the first flight will seldom yield any reward other than a surface-to-air missile up the exhaust.

The game is most constructively played as combat in stages; attacking an enemy runway and then taking it over, then using it as a home base from which another enemy installation can be attacked and so on until all the elements on the map are back

(Left Top) The brave and the few. Well, extremely few actually. Poor Richard hasn't been having much success actually, judging by the state of his kill-o-meter. This is one of the few areas of iffy presentation in the game.

(Left) Using the targetting device as a temporary waypoint can be most effective in combat, especially when in pursuit of an enemy aircraft. The player must remember not to G-out when pulling onto his target, however.

**MiG29M Superfulcrum's predecessor, the comparitively dully titled Mig29 (above) was in every sense a first step. Even when the first game was produced, Domark and Simis had clearly been paying attention to the state of the market and had noted the saturation of heavyweight products. Even before Core turned up and waved their "No-nonsense flight game" banner with Thunderhawk, Domark had produced a flight game with all the over-complexity cut out. However, in the process some of the long-term appeal got sliced away too. Here we have a game with the better qualities of it's daddy and some genuine depth too. Not bad.**

under UN control. Winning each stage will make the player's life easier later on. By destroying supply lines, and isolating particular camps, the enemy forces are less capable of hampering the player's attacks on other installations.

Once waypoints have been decided and weapons selected from either the default combination of both air and surface missiles or the player's own particular favourite setup, it's time to get the MiG airborne. From its stationary position on the runway the aircraft can be brought into the air in a matter of seconds. Simple, logical keypress controls minimise any consultation of the comprehensive manual during play and once airborne the player can appreciate the abilities of both the game and the plane alike.

A factor which made the first MiG game so playable was that the aircraft itself is no pig to fly. Plenty of combat flight sims are hamstrung by complex and finicky controls forcing the player to pay more heed to the joystick and dials than the world outside. Not so here. Everything is provided for the player's comfort and ease of use. The HUD is clear and simple and information is duplicated all over the place. If the player is concerned about altitude when tracking down a target, he need only glance at the altimeter on the HUD which is also pointing the way toward his prey. Likewise, if he's checking to see if his airbrakes have been knocked out by enemy fire, he can still keep the best line for his waypoint home with no effort; it's all displayed in an utterly sensible manner on his control console. The ergonomics here are just as they should be. The player never has to think where to look.

In addition, the fly by wire set-up of the new MiG is simulated well to make the flight even less unnecessarily stressful than before. In order to minimise instability and grey/blackouts caused by pulling too-many G's, a computerized buffer smooths out the player's occasionally frantic stick-wrenches before actioning them on the aircraft. Likewise, an automatic stabilising device will straighten up the aircraft whenever necessary, removing the frustrating need to continually nudge and tap the stick into a

**MiG29M's premise is best described as a midpoint between a Microprose theatre-of-war style affair and the slightly disjointed yet manageable feel of *Interceptor*.**

# FULCRUM

## FLIGHT DECK

The whole point of MiG29M is that it doesn't break down into easy-to-handle missions in the same way that lots of flight sims do. Instead, the plot unfurls over a single mission - to liberate a Southern American country from its newly acquired rebel leaders.

So, to give a better impression of how the game plays, we've taken a pic from each of the major elements found within the mission and detailed them for you.

Working around in an essentially clockwise pattern, the player must perform a sort of leapfrogging action, attacking enemy airbases and then claiming them as his own in order to reach later targets successfully.

To begin with, life is worryingly easy, with the player facing greater difficulty in actually landing his plane on a clean airstrip than downing enemy fighters and weedy little anti-aircraft installations. However, as the game goes on, each take-off could well prove to be the player's last.

Toward the end of the mission life becomes quite frankly impossible, with enemy jets hounding the player into the ground and anti-aircraft guns blasting him as he hits it.

The learning curve from nice and easy combat scenarios to deadly seat-of-the-pants stuff could have been a touch more gentle. But hey, this is war, after-all.

That said, even novice fliers will find none of the frustrating holdbacks other games throw in their path. The MiG is a great aircraft to fly and the new fly-by-wire system will do away with all those frustrating over-compensatory joystick jerks.

What Domark really need to do in order to establish the MiG games as heavyweight play-to-win flight combat games is hurry out a mission disk to extend the longevity of an already excellent games system.

*(Right) The Mountain Range. A bit of a feature of note, since Domark are really rather proud of the fractal generated scenery, while the rest of the world simply raises an eyebrow.*

*When the player is in normal flight, it's best to make use of the auto-stabilisers to avoid this sort of wobbling around.*

*Even when being pursued by an enemy plane, it's worth making use of the backwards view, as missiles can still be targetted from there.*

*It's unlikely, however, that an air-to-air missile will have much success here, owing to the nature and speed of the enemy jet and their extreme flare-friendliness.*

**MiG29M's strongest suit is the storyline and development of the plot through the different stages in the missions. It may not be the most original yarn ever, but it serves its purpose well.**

*The default waypoints aren't out on the map for a joke, so pay attention to them, and don't try to change anything until you've worked through their initial settings.*

*(Above) Dogfight! Striking the enemy planes produces pleasing smoke plumes. Hurrah!*

*(Right) A big refuelling plane! This mysterious creature, found down here in the bottom left hand corner of the map lumbers around the sky with its fuel line all hanging out. But is it one of theirs or one of yours?*

Use the missile point-of-view for a visual of enemy installations far closer than one that could be achieved by flying through the area.

This, dear reader is the main mission screen. It is from here that each stage of the Game begins. This approach works far better than that used in the first game.

Successful attacks launched on ground targets are the key to major point-winning success. Here, the player wisely knocks seven shades out of the installation with air-to-surface missiles.

Lift off! By claiming won enemy airbases as his own, the player can jaunt around the map with greater ease and speed.

Roads are frequently used by trucks and tanks to move supplies around the landscape. Severing bridges and the like will halt the supplies' movement from depots like this.

Red dots on the map screen indicate known enemy air bases, and therefore the likelihood of an airborne attack. Getting this close in a dogfight is visually exciting but not advisable

Take me to the bridge! Since air-to-ground missiles won't lock onto the bridge, the player must use his S240's to take out the rebel-running structures.

Enemy buildings are uniformly defended with at least one anti aircraft gun and possibly some unfriendly MIGs. As a result, it's best to go in low and fast and strike everything hard!

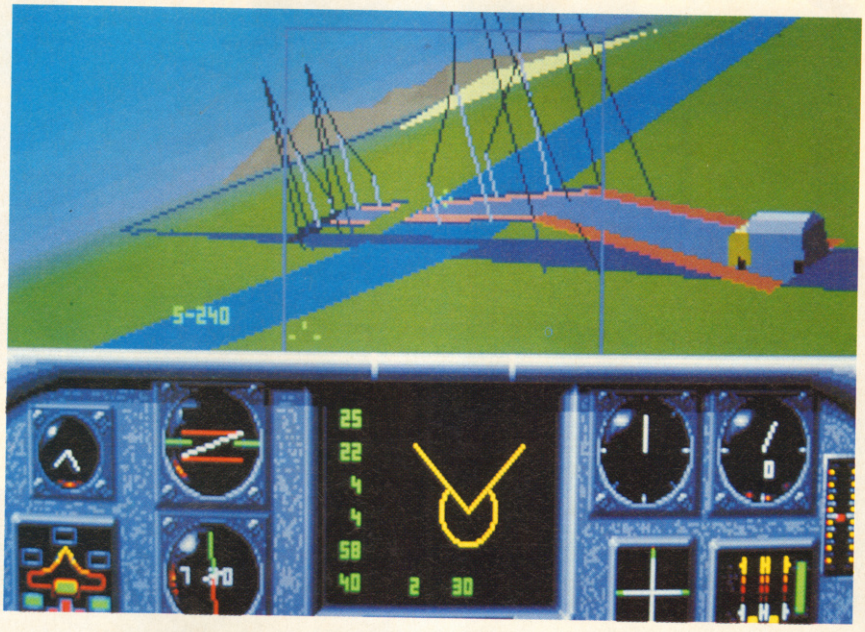
83▶ central position to simply achieve level flight.

Once the desired speed and attitude of flight has been achieved, the MiG's progress can be viewed from a host of angles. Interior or exterior from behind and in front, left and right, tower and standard views are available. Also, for more ego-boosting benefit than any addition to combat awareness, the player can position his "camera" in the most recently fired missile as it screams toward its target or even, at his most perverse, inside the target itself.

Combat in Mig29M is never more than a minute away. The target clusters are constructed to teach the player just enough in one situation to know how to deal with the next. The first waypoints, for example are rather lightly defended and there's little need for any but the most panicky flyboy to miss any point of the action. Targets within range can by cycled through by tapping the appropriate button. A little square box will also highlight the targets position on visual. Should the target be outside the player's cone of vision, a direction line will lead from the centre of the HUD to the target. Thus, aircraft can be chased around the skies a most fulfilling manner, as the player is forced to balance the need to turn more quickly than his opponent to avoid being locked into his enemy's sights with the constant threat of blacking out under too much gravitational pressure.

Dogfights are, for the most part, the most difficult yet satisfying part of MiG29M. Enemy planes will lock on to the player and chase them to death given half a chance. They're decent enough pilots and it's tricky to catch them out. It should be the player's foremost priority in any combat situation to ditch any enemy planes, as they will pose far more of a threat than any anti-aircraft fire that may be encountered.

Aside from all the oh-so complex manoeuvres detailed in the manual, probably the easiest and per-



**Carefree heroism such as trying to destroy the enemy base on the first flight will seldom yield any reward other than a surface-to-air missile up the exhaust.**

*(Above) Strike one enemy fuel depot! Pleasing although rather small explosions serve to reward the successful pilot.*

*(Left) An external view of the MiG preparing to sever one of the enemy supply lines. Preventing arms and food from getting through will weaken the rebels' resolve and fighting ability. Hurrah!*

fectly functional dogfighting move is to thrust away from the enemy plane and force them to chase at top speed. Then, by slamming on the airbrakes and killing all thrust, make the MiG decelerate and turn in as tight a circle as possible. If performed correctly, the move will break the enemy's position and will drag their little green line around from behind to about 30 degrees away from directly in front of the MiG. Increasing thrust and removing the airbrakes, most players will be able to lock on with an air-to-air missile. Since the enemy jet will by now be trying a similar rapid deceleration in order to turn, they will be slow enough to be hit on most occasions.

Incoming enemy missiles can generally be avoided with some frantic flare/chaff dropping and adhering to the basic rule of not flying in a straight line for too long in combat.

Players finding themselves on the receiving end of enemy fire will experience a number of scenarios. Either their jet will perform a rather pathetic swan dive with smoke puffing out of their tail or an increasing number of instruments will conk out. Once in this situation, it's wise to just turn around and head for home, even if only part-way through a mission.

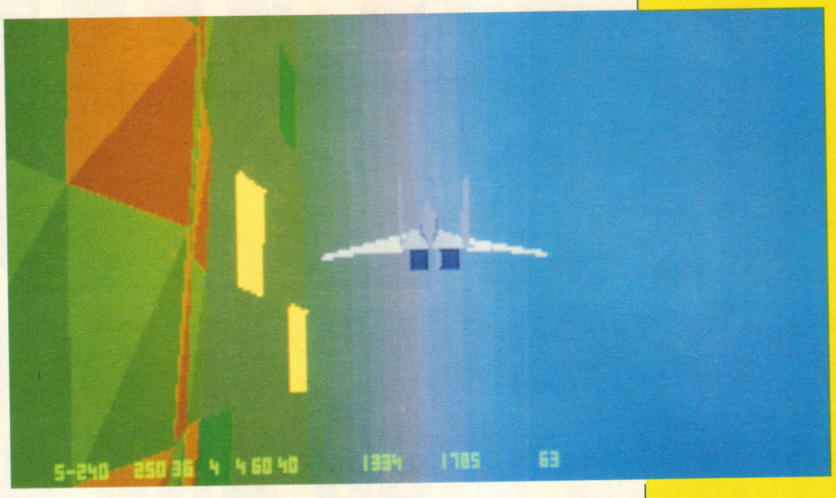
While both the handling of the plane and the pacing of the missions are admirable, MiG's graphic style is worthy of comment, though for different reasons. Criticisms of the first game suggested that the landscape was a little Spartan and could to with some detail. This time, Simis have added lakes, fields and trees as decorative touches to the bridges, tanks and radar towers which actually play a part in the combat.

Most of these elements sit well with the rest of the game, but the decision to use fractals to construct a mountain range in the northwest area of the combat arena seems a little strange. In a game where so much of the visual appeal is based on the clean, smooth look of the graphics, to have a distant mountain suddenly fragmenting into lots of little triangles as it is flown over is a little disconcerting. Quite apart from anything else, it makes the playfield look more like the *Virus* landscape than that of a flight simulator. The shaky realism of the effect isn't helped by the unusually symmetrical nature of the mountain range either.

On all other visual fronts, MiG29M is no slouch. The graduated skyline, the explosions of targets and especially the burning and smoking exhaust fumes which billow from damaged enemy aircraft make the game look really quite special.

So, what level of success have Domark and Simis had? Well, on virtually all accounts, a great deal. Despite minor niggles about some of the graphics and perhaps a worrying doubt that even despite the more grand feel of the mission, it may still be a long way short of a Microprose title for sheer length of apeal, MiG29M Superfulcrum delivers the goods. It's also one of the most entertaining and straightforward polygon combat flight-sims around.

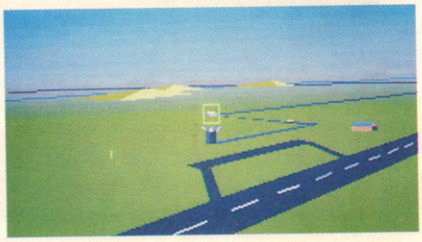
● **Jim Douglas**



## PC version

**Machines running at over 12Mhz will be adequate for MiG's needs. The option to turn off the graduated skyline will further aid players with slower machines. Despite the rather unpleasant typeface used in the briefing and pilot-debriefing modes MiG is a fine example of clean, ordered game design, with a place for everything and everything in its place, capable of sitting easily with games from companies more commonly associated with both PCs and simulations than Domark.**

*Take me to the bridge! One of the vital points on the mission is the destruction of the enemy supply lines. It's also one of the most visually appealing sections.*



*The missile view allows the player to a; get a decent idea of the lie of enemy installations without actually having to fly over them and b; get all the benefits of seeing his target really really close before it explodes ha Ha HAAA!*

## RATINGS

Bearable storyline

Exemplary control over plane

Fine graphics

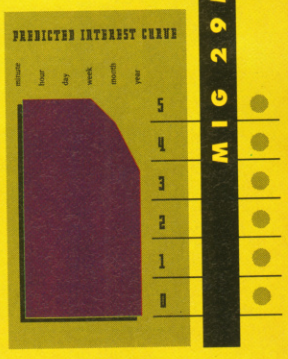
Still doubts over long-term appeal

**860** PC RATING

G 8 IQ 5 A 6 FF 8

**There's no doubt that MiG29M grabs the attention from the moment the rather attactive looping intro sequence flicks onto the screen. And from there on in, the level of interest remains pretty high for a fine old spell, only beginning to wain when the mission has been completed and there's little left to do. Still, the promise of some extra missions disks from the good sticks at Domark may well put paid to even those fears.**

MIG 29M RATINGS



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# console reviews

Over the page, console fans, you'll find the start of ACE's new console section, a suite of pages set aside in the magazine for nothing other than console games. Each month in the mag we'll be devoting a similar number of pages to all things console with the very latest titles on both import and general release reviewed in full colour.

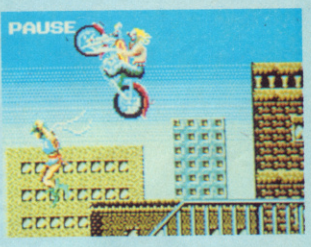
Don't forget that all the new console games we receive each month will be detailed in our Reviews Directory section at the back of the magazine, so even if you don't find anything here to suit your tastes, you may well find something in the pink that'll do the trick.

## This month's games:

91

**91 - Road Rash**

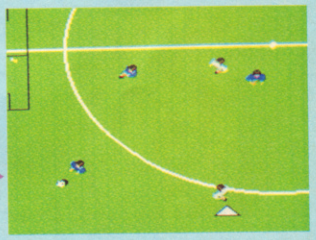
Even the dreadful graphics can't detract from Electronic Arts' new biggie; a motorcycle racing game with more action than you would believe. Race cross country down winding roads while fist-fighting other riders and motorists. 100% smashin' crashin' fun!




93

**93 - El Viento**

Megadrive owners never seen to tire of the stayed old beat-em-up formula and this time we've got two examples of just that. El Viento, the ugly sister of the pair features some entertaining enough fighting but lacks graphic appeal. Nevertheless, it's worth examining for visual novelty value alone.



94

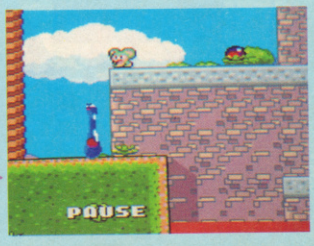
**94 - Pro Soccer**

They said it couldn't be done and they were right! Well, they said it should be done and they were wrong is closer to the truth. Kick Off, the best game in the history of the world (official) has turned out to be a sorry old affair on the Famicom. Oh dear.

96

**96 - Streets of Rage**

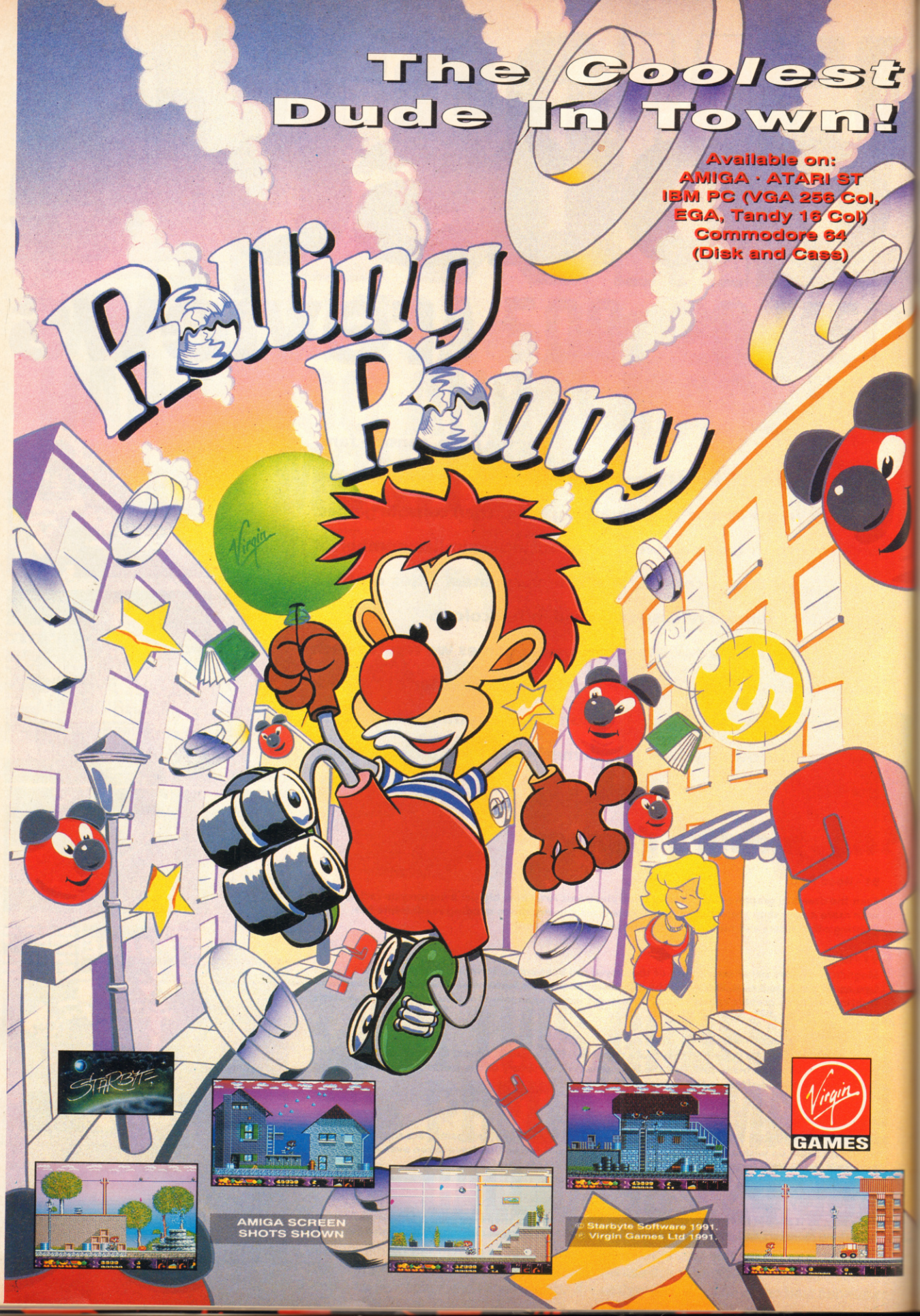
Hit those women! Kick those dwarves! Yes indeed. This is what fighting games are supposed to be all about. Team up with a mate and do battle with the evil forces that have taken over a city and turned it into a New Jack drugland. Broken bottles! Knives! Superplexes! Cor!




99

**99 - Jerry Boy**

Jelly Boy, as it should have been titled involves a little squashy shape crossing a hazard-packed land absorbing monsters and doing good deeds. Before you turn away in disgust, take a look at the review.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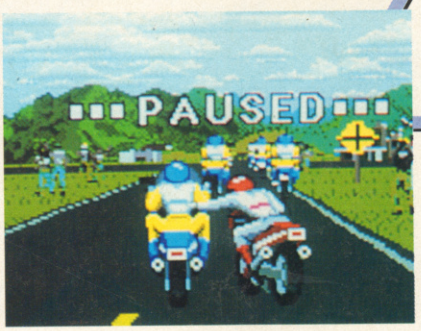
# ROAD RASH

**Race hard! Hit harder! Mad Max meets Super Hang-On in ELECTRONIC ARTS' latest Sega offering. But is it wheelie good or wheelie wheelie good?**

It's never easy trying to pump fresh ideas into a tired old genre - although with its latest effort Road Rash, Electronic Arts has had more success than most in recent times. It's essentially a motorcycle racing game, but with one novel twist - violence. Despite the game's contemporary scenario, Road Rash's designers have had no qualms about making the whole thing as outlandish as possible. What passes for a storyline concerns a crackpot band of speed-freak bikers, known as Rashers, who race each other across the country for cash prizes. Apparently nobody ever bothered with the formality of writing a rulebook and so more or less anything goes. As a result, the days of trying to sneak past the vehicle ahead of you are long gone - in Road Rash all that's required is a hefty kick, punch or slap to knock the offending rider off the road!

The Road Rash consists of five individual races, each on a different track, and each with fifteen riders. EA's previous "alternative" sports games Skate Or Die and its sequel Ski Or Die have obviously been a strong source of inspiration here, as the feel is very similar, consisting of lots of "mondo tubuloso dude" type quotes in the pre-race dialogue. Each of the computer-controlled riders is named and have their own personalities - some are more violent than others.




(Above left) With two cars on the road, there's only one lane available - certainly not enough for all three bikers to sequeeze through. Something's got to give...

(Left) Taking an early swipe at a rival biker at the start of the race.

The racing itself is, for the most part, of the standard Super Hang-On variety, but with a number of neat twists. For a start the tracks are considerably more treacherous than ever before seen, comprising lethal hairpin turns, hair-raising hills and all manner of obstacles. Cars prove the main problem, with added peril provided by roadside trees, signposts and grazing animals. A nice touch is that, when the player crashes, rider and bike are separated in a spectacular accident set-piece, often with the unfortunate biker sent skidding across the tarmac and into yet more obstacles! It's then necessary to run back to the stricken cycle so that racing can resume.

Combat between riders is limited but effective, consisting of a basic punch, a more powerful kick and face-slap and a devastating crack over the victim's head with a cosh - although the latter move can only be executed once the weapon has been snatched from another biker. To knock a rider out of the race, their stamina must be depleted by a series of blows - although a single well-timed hitmay be enough to dismount an enemy. Not so vulnerable are the highway patrolmen that try constantly to pull over bikers for speeding - get caught and it's a night in jail and a hefty fine. The overall goal is to win the Road Rash tournament, which is facilitated by the accumulation of cash - the better the race result, the higher the prize, and money goes towards buying more powerful cycles. It's all too easy to lose cash, though, with the aforementioned speeding fines and on repair costs if the bike is wrecked by consistent crashing.

Road Rash is certainly not your average race game - it's faster than most for a start, and once into the game, it becomes apparent that the violence aspect is not just a gimmick, but a proper gameplay aspect that makes the game all the more fun and involving. It takes a lot of skill to knock a rider off his bike, and mastery of the moves is vital. The game has a lot of character and atmosphere, and the racing action is some of the most exhilarating seen on the 'Drive. Highly recommended to those looking for a quality racer with that little bit extra.

● **Gary Whitta**

**860** MEGADRIVE RATING

| G | IQ | A | FF |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 3 | 8 | 8 |

**Excellent impression of speed.**

**Combat element works well.**

**Thumping good Rob Hubbard soundtrack.**

**Graphics are a little ropey in places.**

**A few more tracks would have been nice.**

**It takes a short while to get a hang of the controls and fighting moves, but once the player is proficient, it's difficult to put Road Rash down. The only slight letdown is the small number of courses - only five - and the lack of any great variation between them, which is likely to eat into the game's long-term appeal. There's a real feeling of speed provided by Road Rash's snappy screen update, and Rob Hubbard's thumping in-game soundtracks provide real atmosphere. The graphics themselves aren't quite as clean as they might have been, but nevertheless Road Rash remains one of the year's more impressive MegaDrive offerings.**

CONSOLE MEGADRIVE

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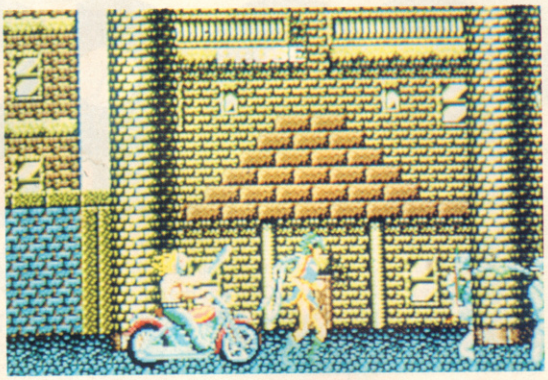
# EL VIENTO

**Ever seen a female ninja? Now you have, and it's all thanks to WOLFTEAM.**

Though many may doubt the integrity of Sega's "classic" martial arts adventure Shinobi, there's little arguing with its phenomenal success. Not only has it been a popular series in its own right, since its inception it has spawned more clones than any other console game. And while the latest in an unbearably long line may not offer much new in the gameplay stakes, it does at least differ from all the other uninspired rip-offs by casting the player as a female hero. Considering that female heroes aren't normally very popular (apart from Wonder Woman and Cheetara out of Thundercats) this does come as a refreshing change. It's just a shame that the game she has to save the world in is so damn dull.



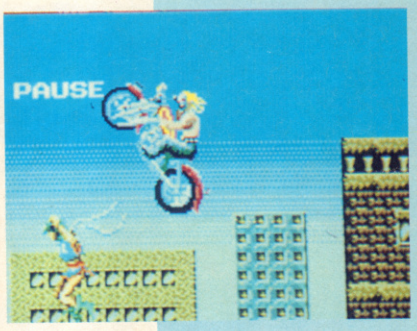
The unintelligible Japanese documentation means that the identity of El Viento and the player's mission must remain a mystery, but it doesn't take a degree course to work out that, whatever ninja woman's objectives in life may be, she goes around them by chopping the hell out of everything she sees. This is in fact necessary, as just about everyone that Mrs Ninja bumps into on her travels is out to get her, from the Dick Tracy type fellows who storm around in raincoats blasting away to the maniac bikers and strange T-shirted individuals who drop bizarre, unidentifiable objects out of the window.

That word "unidentifiable" is quite an important word when playing El Viento, because it applies to just about everything in the game. The graphics are so poorly defined and badly coloured that it's often very difficult to see what's going on and why. The screen display looks like the colours have run and the contrast level is up too high, and the result is such a shoddy mess that if the player hadn't just spend a wad of his hard-earned cash on the game, it's debatable whether or not he'd bother to even pick up the joypad after clapping eyes on the first screen.

The game itself is just about passable, consisting of a number of scrolling stages linked together by doors in a maze-like fashion. The object of each is basically to run up and down lots of stairs, stab all the bad guys and find the door to the next stage. In practice, this can actually be quite fun - it's not too taxing and the ability to waste so many enemies with the rather cool boomerang knives is very satisfying. All this business soon loses its appeal however, especially as the game seems to get remarkably difficult very quickly, and since player control during combat is limited more or less to just hammering away on the fire button, there seems to be little scope for skill or tactics.

While El Viento just about passes as an average Megadrive ninja-type romp, there are scores of other games more deserving of your dosh than this hokum. If you're not really too bothered about whether your on-screen hero has a willy or not, you'd be better advised to check out one of the offical Shinobi games. At least they don't look like there's something wrong with the SCART lead.

● **Gary Whitta**




**515** MEGADRIVE RATING

| G | IQ | A | FF |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

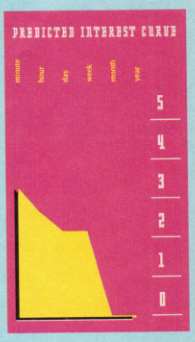
**Acceptable fare for die-hard Shinobi fans.**

**Easy to get into.**

**Godawful graphics and uninspiring sound.**

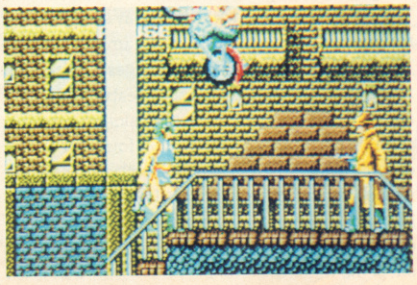
**Limited player control.**

**Repetetive gameplay.**




**The terrible graphics are an instant turn-off, and once the gameplay reveals itself to be little more than substandard running about and killing, you're unlikely to be too compelled to continue. What a bummer.**

**The most abysmal graphics the 'Drive has ever had to endure combine with ear-assaulting muzak to produce the console equivalent of dropping a breeze block on your head. Enough said?**



CONSOLE MEGADRIVE

# PRO SOCCER

CONSOLE SUPER FAMICOM

SUPER FAMICOM RATING **700**

G 6 | IQ 4 | A 5 | FF 6

Fairly playable in its own right.

Plenty of options, two-player works well enough.

Control mode lacks the original's finesse.

Flimsy graphics and a very annoying tune.

**Because of the incompatibility of Kick Off's control with the Famicom controller means Pro Soccer takes a little getting used to - and a lot of patience along the way. But the rewards are there for those who are willing to persevere - just about, and as it's a sports game its lastability is theoretically timeless. An annoying and thoroughly inappropriate tune toodles away during play, and the frustration is further compounded by the indicator arrows, which in the heat of the moment can make it difficult to see what player is under your control. And without the full strength of the original's playability to back it up, Famicom owners are unlikely to be very tolerant of the low-quality sprites.**

**Is Kick Off on the Famicom all it's cracked up to be?**

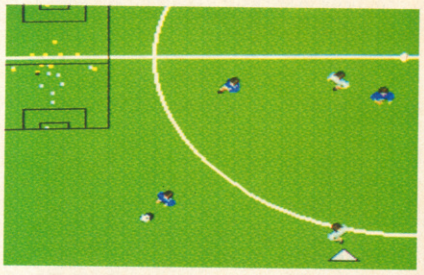
No. Well, it's not that it's bad, but it's certainly not Kick Off either. As reported to you exclusively by ACE last month, Famicom owners can at last experience the Kick Off legend - sort of. Now it's called Pro Soccer so as not to annoy the famous Japanese zip-fastner company called Kick Off, and has undergone all the necessary changes that are part and parcel of an Amiga-to-Famicom conversion. Anybody who's played the ultimate football game (and, as many might argue, the ultimate game full stop) will undoubtedly have been somewhat wary about the prospect of such a conversion - and the finished product has more or less confirmed their fears.

As I say, it's not that it's bad. In its own right it's a fine football game - but in the process of putting Kick Off onto the supposedly more powerful machine, something's been lost in the translation. Technically everything is there - team selection, formations, headers, free kicks, corners, aftertouch, tackling - but so far as the feel is concerned, this Famicom version is the computer game equivalent of a body snatcher. To all intents and purposes it's the same - except that it isn't.

To be fair, it's not the fault of the nice folks at Imagineer who are responsible for the conversion. The problem is that Kick Off's highly-sensitive control mode just doesn't work on a Famicom joypad. The rapid and very delicate changes of direction required to perform the dazzling feats of dribbling and skill that made the original version so good just can't be performed properly on a four-way pad. It doesn't work. So the result is like playing Kick Off with some sort of in-built handicap. It's still possible, with practice, to play with a reasonable degree of skill, but many of the finer techniques go right out of the window. Fortunately the game's a lot faster than certain preproduction versions suggested it might be, so that all-important aspect of the game remains, for the most part, intact. I say for the most part because there are some flaws. The scrolling is fast, but not particularly smooth, and it can be noticably jerky at times. More worrying is the pitch design itself which, when the players are running at high speed, gives the impression that it isn't moving at all. This bizarre optical illusion can be very unsettling indeed.

Admittedly, Kick Off virgins are unlikely to moan too much about this, and they'll see it as just a football game, and on that score it's not a bad effort. It's just about playable and, in two-player mode particularly, there's a fair share of fun to be had. But for those of us in the know, Pro Soccer flies wildly over the crossbar.

**Gary Whitta**



(Above) To the casual obsever, Pro Soccer looks almost identical to Kick Off - but pick up the joypad and the differences becomes only too clear.

(Left) A frenzied struggle for control around the computer player's goalmouth.

# FOOTBALL CRAZY

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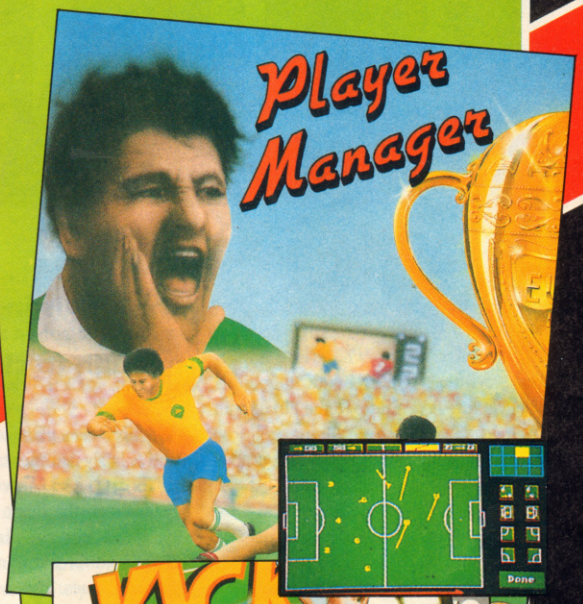

**KICK OFF 2**

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| | |
|---|---|
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# STREETS

**The city is in turmoil! Is SEGA's answer to Final Fight tough enough to clean it up?**

Charles Bronson had it easy. The crime-ridden fictional city that is the setting for Sega's latest Megadrive offering makes the Bronx look like Butlins. The story goes that a once peaceful and thriving metropolis has been torn apart by a secret crime syndicate run by an unknown overlord. With the police either bought off or too frightened to act, the streets have been reduced to a warzone ruled by punks and hoods. Three cops in particular, though, have already taken more than they can stand and, after being refused permission to form a special task force to combat city crime, have turned in their badges and taken to the streets to sort things out in their own way.

Needless to say, these cops don't waste time with handcuffs or rights. In Streets of Rage the objective is simply to kick the crap out of every last lowlife in the city, on a trail that will eventually lead the player to Mr Big himself and the final showdown to decide the fate of the city. But whatever the intricacies of the storyline, what Streets of Rage boils down to is a damn fine beat'em-up in the Final Fight tradition. It's so much in the Final Fight tradition, in fact, that in a lot of respects there's little to differentiate it from CapCom's coin-op classic.

The players progress through eight levels of filth-infested cityscape, starting out in the ghettos and ending up in the luxuriously-furnished palace of Mr Big. Along the way the vigilantes pass through a number of bizarre scenes, including a tropical beach, a car park, a factory and a bridge - in one level all the action takes place on board a boat! The fighting itself is fairly rudimentary, but all the more rewarding for it, as the control system does most of the work. From the basic combination of jump and attack controls, the player can execute a dazzling array of ball-breaking moves and acrobatic martial arts techniques. The combat is context-sensitive, so the move a combatant executes is based not just on the player's command, but also on how he and his opponent are positioned. Attacking from the front results in a simple punch or kick, while coming in from behind opens up possibilities for complex throws and wrestling-style suplexes.

Each of the three main characters available to the player has a distinctive fighting style. Blonde-haired Axel Stone, for instance, is a martial arts expert, specialising in devastating knee-blows and a natty backwards fist slam. Soul brother Adam Hunter is a

*(Right) The two players have three very different characters to choose between. All are rad bone-crunchin' dudes.*

*(Right) Streets of Rage is packed with lots of great moves, such as the flying knee chop here.*

*(left) Beware the evil axe-juggler of doom! Don't be fooled by his prancing - he's one of the nastiest foes around, bettered only by a particularly vicious Freddie Krueger look-alike.*

# STREETS OF RAGE

boxer, with a nice line in punches and shoulder throws, while female Judo expert Blaze Fielding uses chops and kicks to protect herself. These differing styles are particularly evident in two-player mode, with a pair of fighters working together. A neat aspect of the two-player game is that players can use special "team tactics", where both players get together to co-perform a devastating super-move.

The hoods and punks that form the main threat can normally be disposed of with a couple of simple kicks or punches, and only pose a threat when they attack mob-handed. Even then it's possible for the player to floor an entire crowd of enemies with one well-executed flying kick! More serious problems are caused by some of the bigger, badder gang members that are thrown in every now and again to make things more interesting. They include axe-jugglers, fire-breathers and troops of karatekas that come armed with an array of lethal martial arts moves. To help deal with them, there's a host of weapons available, some of which are littered around the landscape at random, with others needing to be liberated from their owners before they can be picked up and used. At the low end of the scale there are the standard flick-knives and broken bottles, ranging up to the far more formidable baseball bat and a giant piece of lead pipe that effectively doubles the player's hit range! A novel touch is the pepper shaker which, when thrown in an enemy's face, stuns him for a few seconds and gives the player the opportunity to steam in. The weapon's lifespan is limited, however - it disappears if dropped twice by the player.

*Streets of Rage features loads of fancy context sensitve moves, i.e moves that are only occur when the player and his opponent are in certain relative positions. Blondy here, for example, is about to flip over the baddy's and then do the same to him, cracking the ne'er-do-wells' head on the floor in the process.*

By far the most impressive - and funny - effect in the game is the Special Attack that each player keeps for specially desperate situations. Only one is available per life, but can save the day in times of need. It seems that each of the three cops has an ally in the corrupt police force, and should things get too hairy, a single button press sends a police car screaming onto the screen, sirens blazing. The friendly cop then appears, armed with a rocket launcher or napalm gun and blows away every enemy in sight! It's an effect best put to use on the end-of-level "boss" combatants - the players get one each to deal with - which are so horribly HARD that it's almost inconceivable to beat them by fair fighting alone. Included in the line-up are a fire-breathing fatty, gangly knife-weilding giants, a pair of tiny but deadly ninja girls and a massive Conan-type character who packs a punch that would knock a building over. So tough are these guys that the special attack serves only to weaken them, but it does at least mean that they can be dispatched without the players having to sustain too much damage.

Comparisons between Streets of Rage and Final Fight are inevitable - well, it's only to be expected when both games feature enemies, weapons and moves that are identical in many cases. The designers score absolutely no points for originality, but they've done a super job of creating a powerful beat'em-up all the same. The one point against it is the rather flimsy graphics, which aren't a patch on Final Fight's hefty and immaculately-drawn visuals. They're rather indistinct, not all that well-coloured and rather flimsy as a result, like they've come from an ST rather than a Megadrive. That point however, is quickly forgotten when the gameplay kicks in (literally), offering a level of violence unparalleled by anything else on the Megadrive - some of the more elaborate techniques are immensely satisfying when they come off and a whole army of scum is floored in one go. And despite the lack of graphical depth, the sound effects ensure that punches and kicks really do sound like they've broken a bone. There is of course a lot more fun to be had when fighting with a friend, especially when it's discovered that all the combat moves can be carried out on each other. In the frenzy of combat, it's often easy to fetch your partner a smack by accident, and such incidents can lead to all-out fights between players. Whether or not it's as good as Final Fight on the FamiCom is bound to be a source of playground debate for some months, but there can be little doubt that Streets of Rage is the finest beat'em-up ever to grace the Megadrive.

● **Gary Whitta**

**885** MEGADRIVE RATING

| G | IQ | A | FF |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 2 | 9 | 8 |

**Lots of interesting weapons to pick up.**

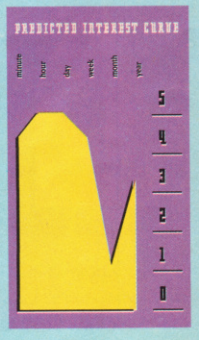
**Instincitve moves.**

**Excellent animation.**

**Smooth character animation.**

**Perhaps a tad too easy.**

**Hackneyed plot.**




**Exceptionally easy to pick up and play, due to the instinctiveness of the control method. Three difficulty settings give the game an extended lifespan, and it's tough enough to keep players at it - even if the final level is a bit off-putting with all the ridiculouly-tough enemies it throws on screen. And since kicking heads is timeless entertainment, this one's likely to prove popular even after completion.**

**Streets of Rage features some of the finest music ever to grace the Megadrive, with a high-quality title theme and a tune for each level, ranging from New Jack City-style rap beats to samba and steel drum combos. Graphically it could have packed more of a punch, but that doesn't detract from the action and there's enough mate-impressing stuff here to sustain anybody's street cred for a good few weeks.**

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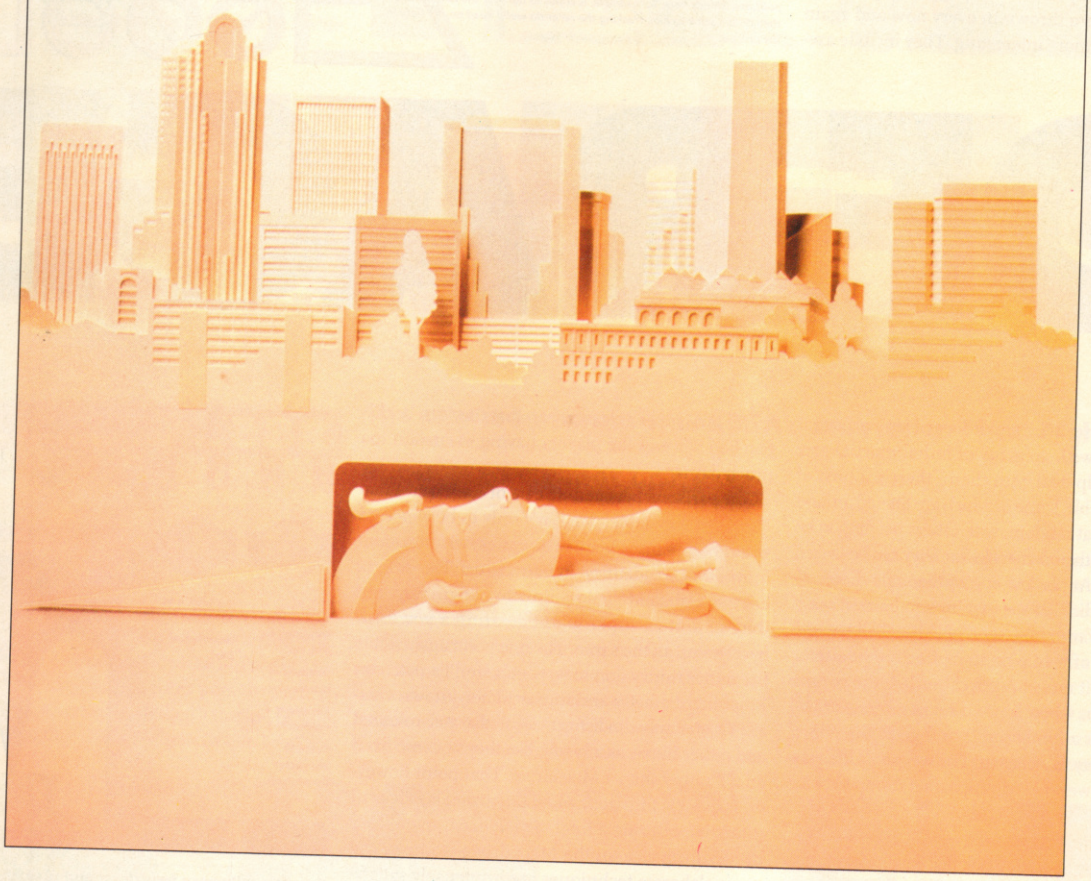

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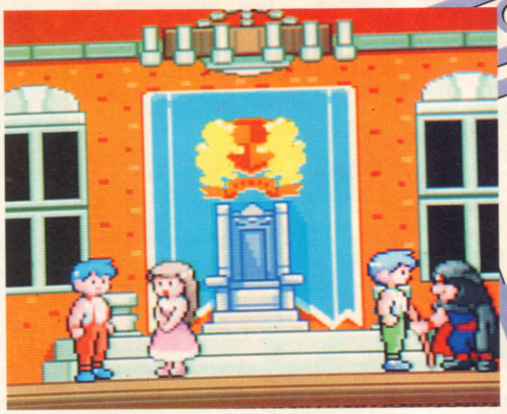
# JERRY BOY

## Is EPIC's jelly-based game set for stardom?

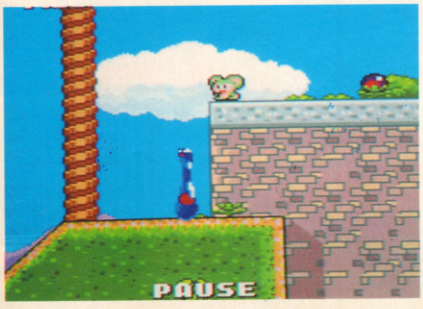


*Jerry Boy has all sorts of crazy larks in Jerry land! If you're looking for a diversion from your usual blasting fare, then the cuteness of JB may well be right up your street.*

Well it's novel, I'll give it that. In the past Famicom gamers have played hardmen, space pilots and even a little Italian plumber - but never a bit of jelly before. In fact the rather obscure title of Jerry Boy can only be put down to the Japanese tendency, as people like Russ Abbot have delighted in imitating for our merriment over the years, to pronounce their Ls as Rs. Jelly Boy - Jerry Boy, see? The Japanese documentation doesn't throw any light on the subject, and after Monkey Kong was re-christened Donkey Kong due to a misheard telephone conversation, you have to assume that anything's possible.

But enough of this nonsense. Silly titles aside, Jerry Boy is actually a very cuddly - and very playable - little game. As far as it is possible to ascertain, the story tells of a little boy (possibly called Jerry, which would explain a lot) who is turned into a blob of blue jelly with a face on it by a cackling old wizard. The idea is to jelly along (or whatever it is a jelly does) the various levels of the mystical world type place where the game is set and re-assume human form. It's all a rather poor excuse for a Super Mario World clone that if nothing else must surely qualify as the cutest console game ever seen - and that's saying something.

Each scrolling stage is essentially a simplified version of a Super Mario World, comprising all the standard platforms, bouncy things, ramps, lifts, bonus bits and end-of-level bosses. The twist that the whole game hangs on is that the player's wobbly character is sort of like a rudimentary version of Terminator 2's T1000, in that it can alter its shape to adapt to its environment. In default mode it's just a blob, but it can turn flat as a pancake to squash bad guys, stand up tall and thin to nobble aerial aliens or squeeze into narrow spaces, stick to walls and ceilings and absorb objects and hold them inside its gelatine body where they remain visible until spat out for later use. The most often used objects are red balls which form the basic weapon against maruading baddies and the end bosses - such as level one's egg-laying chicken.




As the game progresses, Jerry Boy is taken underground in stages that play like a cross between Mario and Sonic the Hedgehog, although throughout the pace of the game is much slower than either of those classics due to Jerry's slow, wobbly movement. As such the atmosphere is very sedate, which suits the game's disgustingly fluffy graphics to a tee as it enhances the feeling of playing a fantasy world. And though it might lack the frenetic action of Sonic or Mario, it's every bit as playable, offering just as much challenge - if not more - in the form of tricky puzzles, traps and obstacles. It's certainly one of the better Famicom games to hit these shores, and comes unreservedly recommended to all fans of the platform genre, as well as anyone who appreciates a game that puts a smile on your face.

**Gary Whitta**

**890** SUPER FAMICOM RATING

| G | IQ | A | FF |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 4 | 8 | 8 |

Lots of points on the cute scale.

Visual novelty.

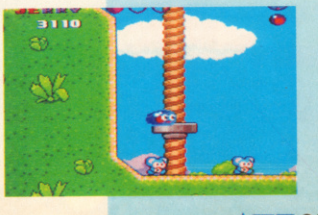
Interesting control methods make a nice change.

Decent enough puzzles

A little too consciously "nice"

Long term appeal is in doubt.

**The control of multi-purpose Jerry Boy takes a little getting used to, but once it's mastered it's difficult to put the joypad down - no matter how frustrating it might get at times. Lots of worlds ensure that premature boredom or completion isn't likely to be a problem. Cute is the key, and there can be no doubt that Jerry Boy features some of the cuddliest characters ever to grace a console. Even the ultra-evil end bosses look sweet. The jolly atmosphere is bolstered well by the bouncy soundtrack, consisting of lots of happy little tunes. How sweet.**



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# Hold The Last Page!

**Well, okay, so it's not quite the last page but this, dear reader is the page we can get long after the others are all happy in being-printed land. And so, what better use of this fascinating quirk in the production schedule than to leave the page free for the last-minute previews that just happen to fly in the door at the eleventh hour. The last minute of the eleventh hour to be precise. And the lucky recipient of the treatment this month is...**

# REACH FOR THE SKIES

The flight simulator is dead - long live the war game! Finally, after years of being at the mercy of unseen controllers, us would-be pilots can now have a say in the running of the battle.

The latest product from Runcorn-based Rowan Software, Reach For The Skies, as the title suggests, takes us back to The Battle Of Britain. The scenario is undoubtedly the best known in the history of aerial combat, and you don't need me to tell you who won and who came second; suffice to say, RFTS covers the entire history of that historic conflict, from the first Luftwaffe raids of July '41 to the end of their ill-judged Blitz two months later and subsequent routing by our now-legendary gallant few.

For most people, the name Rowan Software probably doesn't ring too many bells, but their flight sim pedigree is impressive.

Back in '87/88 McConnell got Rowan Software to put Spectrum Holobyte's awesome Falcon onto the Amiga and ST, which in turn led to them writing Falcon Mission Discs 1 & 2 under their own steam. But bigger and better was to follow, with the release of the much-acclaimed Viet-sim Flight Of The Intruder. However, it was with their most recent product Falcon 3 that they began to move towards the true wargame sim. With the campaign and scenario editing features, the player could position forces and customise their attack plans, and much more, producing a theoretically infinite variety of missions, which is where Reach For The Skies comes in.

To begin at the beginning, RFTS has no missions, which is a point in its favour for a start. The only divisions here are the four phases of The Battle Of Britain as agreed by historians everywhere, in which the Luftwaffe attacked navy convoys, coastal radars, airfields and cities respectively. You can play either side of these scenarios, which means you're trying either to defeat the RAF or to stop this green and pleasant land from being blown to bits.

However, whereas previous strategy/flight sims were mostly just simulation with a bit of add-on planning, with RFTS you soon find that planning the campaigns is as engrossing as the actual flying. Every move you make on the Battle Map, whether it's moving a squadron from one airfield to another or saving an aircraft factory from being bombed, has a knock-on effect on the rest of the game, and if you're not very careful, one wrong move can scupper your chances for the rest of the game.

You'll be able to start where you want, whether you're working it all out from Day One or just dipping in at leisure - no slogging through missions until you get to the good stuff here! All applicable menu functions are available both throughout the set-up and strategy stages, and in flight, and whilst you may say that this is merely an extension of the Falcon menu system, to me it goes a lot further than that, and reminds me more of the usability of Microsoft's Flight Sim series than anything else. Basically, Reach For The Skies can be as simple, or as complex as you like, and will thus suit beginners and flight sim addicts alike.

**Streetdate: October 23rd**
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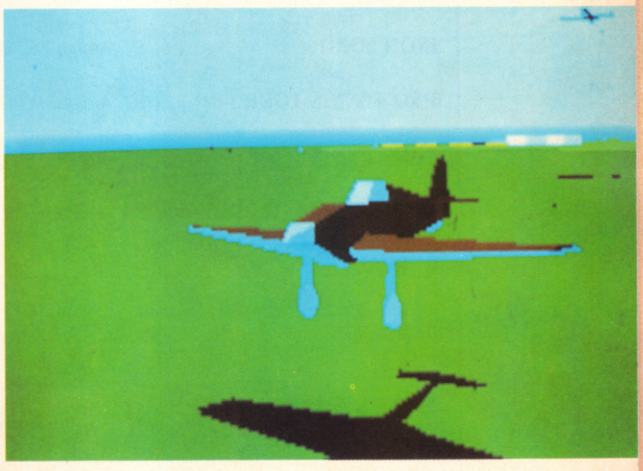
● **Alastair Swinnton**



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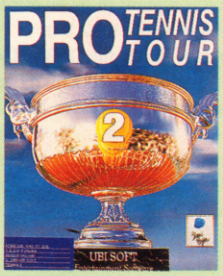


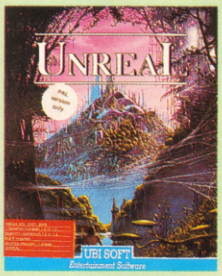

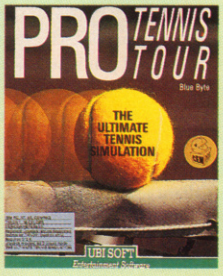


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NEXT, remember that our Reviews Directory will keep you abreast of every game released on your format each month. As the directory builds into a living, growing thing, you'd be wise to get familiar with it before it simply becomes too big!

THEN, remember that our In The Works section will deliver the up-to-the-minute information of the hottest of the hot games as they're put together. Once you've taken a stroll through these and our Previews pages, you'll be fully armed and informed and completely genned-up as to the following month's releases.

FINALLY, consider that ACE has an untouchable track record of breaking the biggest stories first. Not just with some half-arsed whispers and rumours but with hard facts and pictures.

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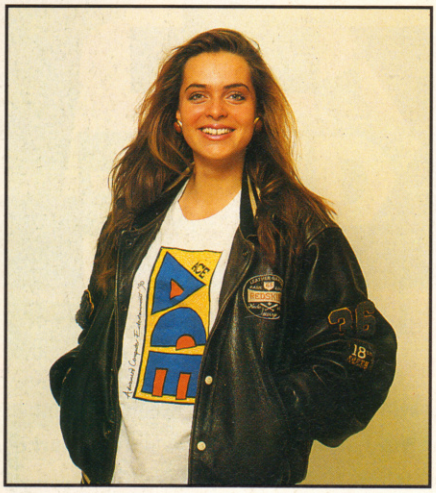

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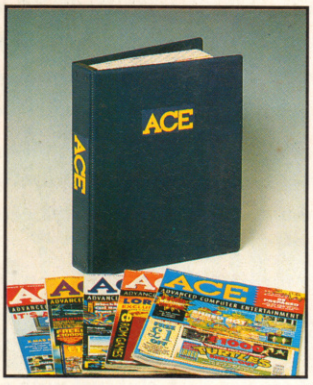

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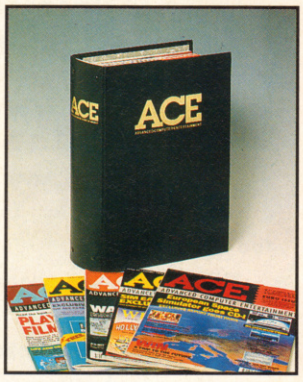

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# reviews directory

**Welcome to the ACE Reviews Directory. Over the page begins probably the most detailed and comprehensive reviews list ever! Well, that's what we reckon, anyway. The aim is to provide the best buyers' guide information on every game that you're likely to find in the shops in any given month. The first list of games are the new titles released during the month in which this issue was produced. The Still Available Section details the games that have been released for the last three months. At the end of each three month cycle the older games will be removed, since they're probably not going to be on the shelves any more.**

**Each month we'll be updating the Directory to incorporate the newest games, always trying to cover every release as we see it.**

**It's important to remember that all games will appear in the Directory section, even the very best titles will be in the Still Available pages, and games which for one reason or another just don't make it into our main reviews section (we can only give our special reviews treatment to a limited number of games, after all) will be appearing in the New Releases pages.**

**Unlike some mags who insist on splitting off all the games which they don't like and sticking them into a rubbishy section, we're making no value judgements here. So don't be surprised to see Trailblazers rubbing shoulders with two-star games. And keep looking through the listings because there's a good chance you'll find a gem that you'll have never heard of.**

**We've arranged the lists, to the best of our remedial school education, in alphabetical order enabling you to get at the game you're interested in as swiftly as possible.**

## New Releases:

Armalyte
Armour-Geddon
Atomino
Burger Time Deluxe
Castelian
Chase HQ
Cloud Kingdoms
Cruise for a Corpse
Deuterous
F-15 Strike Eagle 2
Final Fight
Flicky
Footballer of the Year 2
Gunship 2000
Hunter
Magnetic Scrolls Collection
Megafortress
Megatraveller 2
Monopoly
Monster Business
Nebulus 2
Railroad Tycoon
Rodland
Rolling Ronny
Sarakon
Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe
SIlent Service II
Space 1889
Switchblade II
Thunderjaws
Zone Warrior

## Still Available:

Afterburner 2
Alien Storm
Beast Busters
Bonanza Bros
Castle of Illusion
Castles
Centurion Defender of Rome
Champion of the Raj
Choplifter II
Chuck Yeager's Air Combat
Dragon Crystal
EA Hockey
Elf
The Executioner
F117A Stealth Fighter 2
F14 Tomcat
F Zero
Frenetic
Ghost Battle
G-Loc
Golf
Halley Wars
Hatris
Heart of China
Hero Quest
In Your Face
James Buster Douglas Boxing
Jetfighter 2
Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker
Ka-Ge-Ki
Logical
Magic Pockets
Manchester United Europe
Martian Dreams
Marvel Land
Maupiti Island
Mercs
Mega lo Mania
Microprose Golf
NBA All Star Challenge
Prehistorik
R-Type II
Robin Hood
Secret of Monkey Island
Shinobi
The Simpsons
Sliders
Sneaky Snakes
Sonic The Hedgehog
Super Professional Baseball
Super R-Type
Tail Gator
Thunderhawk
Utopia
Wardner Special
Warzone
Wild Wheels
Wing Commander II

**Give Us A Break!**

*Please remember, this is the very first month of the Directory and there will inevitably be some omissions and screw ups. For this we apologise in advance, and promise to do better next time. Of course, if you don't find any errors, we're proud to say that we knew it would all run smoothly.*

# new releases

## ARMALYTE

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Thalamus**

It's just as well space is infinite - it'd need to be to contain the seemingly endless stellar battles that, according to the softcos, constantly rage throughout the Universe. Thalamus' latest hymn to galactic violence is a 16-bit updating of its C64 hit from many Earth years ago.

The player is given the difficult - if completely unoriginal - task of fighting his way through five levels worth of horizontally-scrolling scenery populated by all manner of really rather annoyed aliens. The scenery scrolls a little up and down, which introduces a small but welcome element of exploration as the player weaves around trying to find the safest path to the end-of-level monster.

Armalyte is an unworthy tribute to its illustrious 8-bit ancestor. Technically it's excellent, with some slick parallax scrolling (especially good on the ST version given the machine's hardware) and polished presentation. However, the difficulty level has been set ridiculously high, and even the most skilled gamer will soon be reduced to an apoplectic state of hair-tearing frustration. This situation is not helped by the excessive inertia on the player's ship which soon has the fragile craft skidding uncontrollably about the screen (and usually straight into the deadly-to-the-touch scenery). On the basis of the evidence here let's hope Armalyte's sub-title of The Final Run is correct.

☆☆☆

## ARMOURGEDDON

*Price* **Atari ST £25.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **Psygnosis**

Pysgnosis' latest 3D-polygon effort centres around a six-part mission to find the five pieces of a nuetron bomb and use it to destroy an enemy HQ. There are six combat vehicles to try out, ranging from ground-hugging tanks and hovercraft to high-flying jets and helicopters, and the player must use his 'skill and judgement' to decide when, where and how best to use them to achieve his current mission objectives. Mouse control of each each vehicles is smooth and responsive, with the fluid 3D giving a good pulse-quickening feeling of speed.

The player can switch between the vehicles 'in the field' using the function keys (the computer puts the vehicle on auto when this happens, so there's no risk of a recently-vacated jet ploughing nose-first into the ground). Like Core's *Thunderhawk*, the accent is on action rather than simulation, with the enemy attacking almost as soon as the player pokes an metal-shielded nose out of his bunker, which makes for exciting if somewhat relentless action. But it's not all shoot, shoot, shoot. There's an important resource management element as well, where the player has to wisely allocate scientists and technicians to develop new weapons and fresh vehicles to replace those blown to pieces by the very active enemy.

Armourgeddon is one of Psygnosis' best games to date, with solid gameplay backing up the impressive visuals. Armourgeddon sick of it? Not one bit.

☆☆☆☆

## ATOMINO

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Puzzle**
*Publisher* **Psygnosis**

Hmmm, fashinating! There are few games based around atomic physics, and even fewer interesting one, so a big "Huzzah!" and pat on the back for Psygnosis. Atomino is a puzzle game based around atomic valency, i.e. the number of bonds an atom can make with other atoms, i.e. Hydrogen atoms can make one bond while Helium can make two. The aim of the game is to place randomly-allocated atoms down on a grid and try to form molecules of various sizes (i.e. at least three atoms big). A molecule is only complete when all the atoms within it have all their bonds accounted for. It all sounds a bit... well... dry, but in fact turns out to be great fun, with its addictive challenge, pretty graphics and rising-tempo sound making it one of the better puzzle games on the market.

☆☆☆☆

## BURGER TIME DELUXE

*Price* **GameBoy £29.99** Import
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Data East**

Now this is a real blast from the past, when arcade games didn't have to throw punters about like some sub-standard funfair ride just to get them to part with their cash. The player has to guide tiny Pete the Chef around a network of platforms and ladders. In a bizarre culinary exercise Pete has to make giant hamburgers by walking over the various ingredients lying on the platforms, forcing them to fall down the screen onto the platform below and eventually onto a plate at the bottom of the screen. Once all the hamburgers have been made Pete advances onto the next, more complex arrangement of platforms.

Now this all sounds a bit easy, but you've reckoned without the mutant sausages, gherkins and fried eggs that've escaped from the cupboard and are wandering the platforms intent on Pete's demise. Fortunately the canny chef is armed with a pepper pot, and a carefully-aimed shake will stun the baddies for a few moments allowing Pete to make good his escape. More finally, Pete can try to time his food-dropping antics to crush the ingenious ingredients. Burger Time Deluxe is a fun little game, although the graphics verge on the miniscule. It's probably a bit too simplistic for today's younger gamers, but nostalgia buffs will enjoy this tasty slice of the past.

☆☆☆

## CASTELIAN

*Price* **GameBoy £29.99** Import
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Triffix Entertainment**

Remember *Nebulus*? It was a bizarre platform game starring a tiny blob called Pogo. Each of its torturously-difficult levels was set on a tall tower. The play-

er could move Pogo left and right, and make him jump over gaps or shoot at the weirdo aliens. However, in a unique twist, the towers used to rotate to follow Pogo's movement. Quite a graphical achievement on the Speccy! Now *Nebulus* has come to the GameBoy under the title Castelian. And while the name may have changed the game certainly hasn't. It still looks stunning and plays well but has a difficulty rating through the roof. However, completing a tower is extremely satisfying, so if you fancy a real challenge then you know where to come.

☆☆☆☆

## CHASE H.Q.

*Price* **GameGear £29.99** Import
*Genre* **Race Game**
*Publisher* **Taito**

There can be few readers who aren't familiar with the excellent coin-op or its sequel *S.C.I.* What a brainwave on the part of the designers to combine high-octane racing action with bumper-ramming action. The player takes on the role of an Armani-wearing Miami Vice style cop, chasing various perps in a souped-up Porsche with the aim of ramming their quarry off the road to make the arrest. The GameGear version is technically excellent, with lots of fast action and good sound, although the cars are a little small. Unfortunately it's about as tough as a peeled banana, and even Granny will soon be locking away Mr Big. You're busted? Well, actually you're more likely to just be bust after buying this - it's a lot of money for such a short-lived challenge.

☆☆☆

## CLOUD KINGDOMS

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga £7.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **GBH/Gremlin**

Cloud Kingdoms is a load of balls - bouncing balls, to be precise. (Ha! The old ones are the best!). As Terry the Ball, the player has to negotiate thirty-two huge multiway-scrolling levels, each of which floats high in the sky, collecting all the gems that litter to the narrow walkways. Terry has to take care not to leave the paths, else he'll fall to his doom in the void below. This isn't as easy as it sounds - Terry's rubbery body bounces wildly off walls and pillars, and parts of the floor may crumble beneath him. In addition, if Terry passes over arrows set in the floor they'll push him around, usually over the edge of the nearest chasm. If that weren't enough, other hostile spheroids wander the walkways, keen to see Terry's demise. Fortunately Terry can bounce over their heads with a tap of the fire button.

Cloud Kingdoms, formerly from Millenium, is an attractive game, with a strong console feel. The cutesy graphics, though looking a little dated now, do the trick, and the scrolling on both Amiga and ST versions is very smooth. The inertial control is a little tricky to get to grips with, but rewarding when mastered. Some features annoy, like the fact that its impossible to know where crumbling floor is until it's been bounced on, but overall this is an unmissable bargain at just under eight quid.

☆☆☆☆

## CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

*Price* **Amiga £TBA**
*Genre* **Adventure**
*Publisher* **Delphine/US Gold**

The plot for Cruise for a Corpse is firmly rooted in the Agatha Christie 'isolated location, plenty of suspects' crime story tradition, detailing how the player is invited to a Greek tycoon's yacht for a well-earned holiday only to get there and find his host bumped off by an unknown murderer. Before you can say "Inspector Wexford" the player is forced to don poncy moustache and tufty sideburns to solve the heinous crime.

After a lot of pre-release interest from the press, there were high hopes for Cruise for a Corpse. Is it the excellent game everyone seemed to think it'd be? Well, yes... and no. In the graphics and sound department it's exemplary, with large fluidly-animated sprites moving over exquisitely detailed backgrounds and plenty of suitable tunes and samples playing away in the back-


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ground. All conspire to generate an excellent sense of mood and atmosphere.

The player directs his on-screen character ('Raoul') via the mouse. By clicking the mouse pointer on objects of interest, a menu appears listing the various things the player can do with the selected item (i.e 'Open' or 'Examine' hat box). Movement around the yacht is effected by walking Raoul from location to location by clicking on exits to the current location, such as doors or hallways, or more quickly by calling up the yacht map and 'sending' Raoul immdiately from place to place. As as user interface it's difficult to think of another as intuitive and easy to use.

The major problem with Cruise for a Corpse is its pace. The animation, though wondrous, is slow. Examining the contents of a room can become quite painful, as Raoul slowly turns, walks, turns, bends down, examines the item only for a message to appear stating that "There is nothing of interest here". Equally annoying is the frequent though inevitable accessing and swapping of the five (count 'em) game discs. All too often the player's enthusiasm for clue hunting can be severely dampened by the reduction of the game's speed to near snail's pace. Less important, some of the generally excellent French-English translation is a bit dubious in places, such as the Cabin Boy who is described as "dynamic".

Those comments apart, anyone with the patience to sit through the occasional doldrums will find Cruise for a Corpse a superb buy, heaped with quality presentation and atmosphere and presenting a big enough game task to satisfy even the greatest sleuth.

☆☆☆☆

## DEUTEROS

*Price* **Amiga £TBA**
*Genre* **Strategy**
*Publisher* **Activision**

This sequel to *Millenium 2.2* by the same authors is set a thousand years after the prequel's events. Mankind has fallen into a sort of post-technological malaise and forgotten its former space-travelling glory. It's the player's task to rekindle man's passion for the stars and turn the race into the masters of the Galaxy once again. The gameplay boils down to endless resource and manpower allocation between various departments, dealing with the occasional crises that crop up and so on. Although programmed well and moderately enthralling, there really isn't anything on show that hasn't been done more entertainingly elsewhere. Strictly one for the strategy die-hard.

☆☆☆

## F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II

*Price* **Atari ST £29.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **MicroProse**

MicroProse make a departure from their usual rigorously-accurate sims with this action-orientated affair. It's the flight sim equivalent of the Janet and John books, i.e. nice n' simple with no complications. Players have six combat arenas to choose between, each with various missions to select. These missions are nearly all are simple get in, destroy a couple of targets and get out alive jobs, with the player having to simultaneously defend against swarms of enemy jets. Control is via keyboard, joystick or mouse, and is highly responsive in each case.

The screen update is fast enough, but there are quicker 3D routines about - it's more than adequate for the job in hand, however. Sound is disappointing, with a white-noise hiss being the player's only audio companion for most of the journey. In the gameplay department this is a winner, with plenty of white-knuckle action to get the adrenalin pumping. Veterans may bemoan the game's lack of depth, but anyone else should find this just their cup of tea, with a yummy Jammy Dodger in the saucer to boot.

☆☆☆☆

## FINAL FIGHT

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Beat-'Em-Up**
*Publisher* **US Gold**

Yet another in US Gold's seemingly endless string of CapCom conversions. In Metro City (loosely based on Noo Yoik) all is not well. Crime is rife and to make a bad situation worse the Mayor's right-dreamy daughter has been kidnapped by - you guessed it - Mr Big. (This old Mr Big certainly gets around, doesn't he?) The player and optional partner have to fist-fight their ways through the city's wastelands to rescue her. Why? Why not?

Final Fight is something of a first for beat-'em-ups on the home computer, i.e. it's actually quite good. The sprites are large and decently animated, the background scroll is smooth and the action is fast. Someone of the detecting whether a punch connects or not is a little dodgy, but apart from that this can be recommended unreservedly to anyone who fancies a little aggro without bruising their knuckles.

☆☆☆☆

## FLICKY

*Price* **MegaDrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Sega**

"Don't be put off by the screenshots on the back of the box" is probably the best bit of advice I can give about Flicky. It looks awful - tiny primary-colour sprites and garish backdrops. And to be honest, things don't improve much in the game itself. However, like Quasimodo, an ugly appearance conceals the goodness inside.

The player controls the tiny bird of the title. The lickle darling's chicks have gone and got themselves lost in the rooms of a giant cat-infested house. Flicky has to run and jump about, collect her scatterd brood and take them to the safety of the Exit, while avoiding the prowling felines. Flicky is a wonderfully playable game, very simple but packed with fun. Some may dispute whether there's £35-worth of fun, but for those with the cash it's a good purchase.

☆☆☆☆

## FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR 2

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga £7.99**
*Genre* **Sport Game**
*Publisher* **GBH/Gremlin**

This isn't really a sport game at all. It's more like a test of the player's knowledge of football trivia. Lots of text and dull graphics don't help things along, either. If triv's your bag then great, otherwise steer well clear.

☆

## GUNSHIP 2000

*Price* **IBM PC £39.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **MicroProse**

Nobody writes simulations like Microprose does. This is a highly-realistic sequel to the comapny's earlier mega-hit *Gunship*, which has gone done in software history as one of the best-selling sims ever. This sequel is far more than just *Gunship+*. Every part of the game has been given a radical overhaul.

Probably the most impressive aspect is the revamped graphics system. Using a sort of patchwork-quilt landscaping technique, the gameworld has been modelled in exacting detail, complete with rise, hills, mountains, valleys, cuttings. If it's a geographical feature, it's there. As usual, the game takes the form of a series of pilot-testing missions. Unfortunately this complexity means that you really need at least a 16MHz PC to get anything approaching speed from the game. Sound with a board is marvellously atmospheric, and adds no end to the gritty battlefield feel. The 'copter control is good, but actually getting the craft to fly matches that of the real thing, i.e. it's very difficult, and certainly makes Gunship 2000 not the sort of game to cut your sim-playing teeth on. However, if you're looking for the ultimate chopper simulation, then here it is.

☆☆☆☆☆

## HUNTER

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
*Genre* **Action Strategy**
*Publisher* **Activision**

It's a sad old world, this one we live in. Just when poor old Activision get some decent product together, their Mediagenic daddy goes and pulls the plug on them. Now, however, after the aforementioned 'decent product' has

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**ACE 11/91**

been swilling around doing very little indeed for the last few months, Activision's current putter-outer of games, The Disc Company have taken it upon themselves to let another trickle of gameyness reach the streets.

Hunter is the sort of game that you dream of playing. A polygon based action strategy game will all of the usually associated nonsense removed, it offers all the "wouldn't it be great if..." features which should, by rights, be included in all these games.

Taking the role of the Hunter, the player must travel around a bunch of islands, systematically destroying all enemy installations in whatever way he sees fit. Your particular mission is detailed in a briefing where specific, immediate targets are detailed by your allied commander.

The best thing about Hunter is that there's no messing about. If you want to infiltrate an enemy base, get a disguise and you're away! If you want to get about, steal a helicopter/jeep/truck or sailboard. It's all so easy and because the unnecessary complexity of basic tasks has been removed, the player can concentrate on progressing with the mission much more intently.

Excellent graphics and a fast-paced storyline can only add to Hunter's already awe-inspiring style. A winner.

☆☆☆☆☆

## MAGNETIC SCROLLS COLLECTION

*Price* **IBM PC £34.99**
*Genre* **Adventure**
*Publisher* **Virgin Games**

For gamers keen to add some heavyweight adventuring to their catalogue but unwilling to fork out for the undeniably quirky Magnetic scrolls titles individually, the fascinatingly names Magnetic Scrolls collection may well prove an appealing prospect. Here we have three previously acclaimed titles, all tweaked and tuned to run on the *Wonderland* window system, ensuring a reasonable degree of coherence in what would otherwise be a rather diverse package. The Guild of Thieves by far the most traditional game in the set, all ancient plotting and the like, while Corruption offers a lot of moody conspiracy theorist shenanigans against a high-flying industry backdrop. Fish! is just plain odd, comprising some tricky puzzles with painful aquatic punning.

All the titles are packed with atmospheric if not actually stunning graphics which, for the benefit of purists, can be removed with a click of a switch.

Despite the difference of opinion on the Magnetic Scrolls parser (it's either the best thing since sliced bread or a wonky imitation of the Infocom system of about ten years ago) players will still find far more entertainment and scope for plot involvement than in any other game system. Worthwhile.

☆☆☆☆

## MEGAFORTRESS

*Price* **IBM PC £34.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **Mindscape**

The trouble with games based on taking every single role in a big, stupid old plane like the B-52 is that virtually every role is mind-numbingly boring.

I mean, who honestly wants to plot their course across thousands of miles of terrain using a 3D terrain mapping computer or have to fiddle around with ultrasound frequencies in order to jam the enemy's radar? Not many of you, I'll be bound.

The aim of the game is to pilot a battle-scarred B-52 across both Iraq and the Soviet 'Union', keeping the location and aim of your mission utterly secret until the awesome tonnage of firepower can be unleashed on the target.

Unfortunately, for all its gung-ho packaging and intent, MegaFortress is just a very good simulation of a rather dull business. Far more fun can be had in any of a host of more recently released flight games, and Microprose's *Stealth Fighter* series even offer similar creep-up-on-the-enemy antics for those players who are especially keen on that sort of thing.

Perfectly competent both graphically and on the play front, MegaFortress has missions designed by real B-52 navigator and best selling author Dale Brown, and it's all packed full of flight charts and information and it reeks of authenticity. The trouble is, despite all this, it just isn't that much fun. It's one of those games that I guess you really need to have experienced the real thing to appreciate.

☆☆☆

## MEGATRAVELLER 2: QUEST FOR THE ANCIENTS

*Price* **IBM PC £TBA**
*Genre* **RPG**
*Publisher* **Paragon/Empire**

This latest UK release from American software team Paragon (covered earlier in this issue) is none too surprisingly a sequel to *MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy*. As before, the player leads a team of five space adventurers through toil and trouble to (hopefully) riches and fame. This time around, the player task is to find a way to halt the flow of toxic slime emanating from some mysterious ruins left by a dead race called the Ancients. But are they dead? That is up to the player to find out...

Sporting high-quality 256-colour VGA, this is certainly a treat on the eye, and the ears as well with a suitable sound card. The game itself is an RPG in the *Ultima* style, but not half as rigorous - which for many will be more than a blessing. The story is fun and involving, with plenty of sub-tasks to perform that provide welcome and often amusing relief from the main plot. If one has a minor niggle it's that the space combat - which you'd think would be the most exciting part of the game - is flat and dull, with little sense of player involvement. In summary, highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

## MONOPOLY

*Price* **Amiga £34.99**
*Genre* **Strategy**
*Publisher* **Virgin Games**

Money, money, money, etc. The game for budding property tycoon may well bring about a peculiarly manic feel in these recession-hit times, but Virgin's version is almost as much fun as the boardgame original; which is more than can be said for most boardgame conversions. Players must trounce around the board by rolling dice, accumulating as much cash as possible and using it to purchase squares on the board. Landing on a previously purchased square involves the unfortunate player either having to pay rent/tax/bills to either the owner of the property or the bank. Players who do the best are those who invest wisely and build houses, hotels etc on their spaces. Extra hassles are thrown up by unlucky 'Go To Jail' squares. He who ends the game with the most cash wins.

Without any unnecessarily flashy graphics, this version fairs better than most, and is refreshingly bereft of all the silly touches which softcos insist on adding to board game conversions for novelty and ruin the whole thing in the bargain.

Colourful graphics present the board in a perspective 3D rather than plan, while the computer controlled bank keeps an eye on everyone's progress. User friendly mouse control makes the player's actions over his piece's position and money-shuffling almost as easy as when playing the game in real life.

☆☆☆☆

## MONSTER BUSINESS

*Price* **Amiga £24.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Eclipse**

The mad meanies from the big forest have once again broken loose, and are searching for little items they can steal completely spoiling Mr Bob's construction site. Become Leroy, the best beast buster around and blow all these nasty little monsters sky high! A goal in life if ever there was one. Monster business, the epitome of the average arcade game features stupid graphics and a doubly stupid premise - to retrieve all the objects from the building site, Leroy must blow up all the monsters with some sort of fatal bicycle pump, causing them to inflate and eventually rise to the top of the screen, dropping all their objects as they go.

Despite the idiocy of the whole affair, Monster Business is actually quite good. Different screens each present a different sort of hazard, whether it be sliding platforms or a speedy time limit, and the player is so interested in trying to get the the end of the level that he probably won't realise quite how crass and daft the game is.

Smart graphics and it-could-only-be-German music help Monster Business rise about the pack and shine out as

an example of what arcade games should be about. It's like an Abba record, if you know what I mean.

☆☆☆☆

## NEBULUS 2

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **21st Century Entertainment**

Rising from the Hewson ashes like a phoenix looking exceptionally like whatever it was before it was burnt, 21st Century Entertainment aren't having much luck at the moment. Not only are they having some considerable difficulty with their MegaDrive product, but the one game that looked like it could actually make them some money has turned out to be somewhat of a disappointment.

The European coders responsible for sequelling John Phillips' original classic have done a bit of a botch job, ruining the gameplay that made the first game so excellent by piling on lots of inane and useless power-up type features. The classic formula has been totally swamped by the sheer weight of these new 'ideas', and as such anybody who enjoyed the first game is likely to be very disappointed by this. However, it is quite pretty and, at least for those who haven't seen the first game, not a total washout on the playability front. But while the first game knew exactly where the addiction/frustration threshold was, Nebulus 2 steps over it like it wasn't even there. Not recommended.

☆☆

## RAILROAD TYCOON

*Price* **Amiga £35.99**
*Genre* **Strategy**
*Publisher* **MicroProse**

The ACE Strategy Benchmark game makes it's way onto the Amiga, and what a fine conversion it is! Building a railroad empire across the USA at the turn of the 20th Century may sound like hard work, but for those who like their strategy to run deep, Sid Meier's simulation of that very pursuit is fun Fun FUN! We know its difficult to imagine how, but trust us, it is. The feeling of power is paramount as you lay your track from sea to shining sea, conduct big-time business and generally earn loads of cash.

Beginning life as an entrepreneur in the early 1800s, you must turn a small stake into the biggest stake in railroad industry history ever! By taking control of every element in the decision making process which makes the railroad work, the player must handle tiny details as well as broader political and economic issues, all at the same time as competing either with a friend or against rival tycoons from history. And every element of the game is represented with top-quality graphics to make even the most number-crunchingly intense sections of the title easy to manage.

Meier's excellent, friendly user interface and the sheer precision of the game design and balance compared with the top-notch power of the Amiga make this version of the game an outright winner. Wholeheartedly recommended.

☆☆☆☆☆

## RODLAND

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Storm**

Stomach-emptyingly cute it may be, but there's no denying that Rodland is a fine game. The Jaleco coin-op wasn't particularly noteworthy, finding itself adrift in a sea of graphically excellent games upon its release. Now, however, the conversion seems to have cropped up when the highest-profile cute game over the moment (*Magic Pockets*) has failed to meet expectations.

The player must work his way through a massive suite of screens, collecting points n' power ups and killing monsters with his rod (hence the name) by bashing them into the floor.

The end of each level is marked by the arrival of an enormous end of level bad guy such as an elephant, who, despite looking about as threatening as a big lump of cotton wool in a knitted bag will do for the players forthwith.


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Interestingly enough, the player can opt to play a girl if he/she wants, not that it makes much difference to the playing style. And to be honest, the 'boy' looks so bleeding effeminate you'd never know anyway.

Chock-a-block full of excellent visuals, Rodland is a fine conversion and it could even be argued to better its coin-op parent, as control over the characters has been improved. Certainly not a title for gamers into depth or gung-ho blasting, but a nonetheless worthwhile purchase for anyone else.

☆☆☆☆

## ROLLING RONNY

*Price* **Amiga £19.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Virgin Games**

Rolling Ronny is a rollerskating errand boy. He must skate around Fieldington collecting spinning gems and delivering packages for people. At the end of each set of Fieldington streets, Ronny must get on a bus and go to a different part of Fieldington to collect more gems and deliver more packages.

The player must guide Ronny around, making precision jumps in order to scale the tall buildings atop which the gems usually sit.

In it's cuteness and simplicity, Rolling Ronny is sort of like *Car-Vup*; lots of primary colour graphics filling in the blanks for what is effectively an extremely basic game of left/right object collecting action. Where *Car-Vup* failed in its control over the player's character, however, Rolling Ronny succeeds. He can twist around in mid-air, duck and jump to avoid monsters in a manner frustratingly absent from his automotive relative.

It's not until Ronny starts falling over and being pathetic that the player is reminded of quite how difficult rollerskating can be. More often than not we find little Ronny on his arse with tweety birds and stars flying around his head.

Completion of a level will result in a nice little bus trip, assuming Ronny has completed enough errands for people to earn the cash for the far. Otherwise a rather unceremonious 'Game Over' sequence ensues.

Perfectly entertaining nonsense from, surprise surprise, German coders Starbyte.

☆☆☆

## SARAKON

*Price* **Amiga/Atari ST/IBM PC £19.99**
*Genre* **Puzzle**
*Publisher* **Virgin Games**

Games which call the player stupid are unlikely to go down in history as great entertainers, yet Sarakon, despite making this fatal mistake is a perfectly decent rip-off of the *Mah Jong* tile-swapping business. Basically, if you imagine *Snap* played with some old oriental tablets and with some complicated 'can't do that' rules, then you're pretty close to imagining what Sarakon is all about.

The aim of the game is to click on similar tablets which sit in a particular orientation, eventually ending up with no tablets left, or at least as few as possible before the time limit runs out. Once done, the player is rewarded with a breakdown of his score and a comment from the computer as to his Sarakon ability.

The problem with these puzzle games, however, is that they all look similar enough to make the player want to pick them up and have a go, yet they insist on containing enough rule subtleties to make doing just that impossible. The result? The *Mah Jong* player will feel infuriated that he can't make his normal moves work.

The presentation is first class, apart from the cheesy sound effects and music which don't so much create the ambiance of the Far East as a grubby take-away in Dulwich.

If comparatively sedate mouse-clicking is your bag, and your eyes can stand staring at the monitor for ages while you scratch your head, Sarakon is the game for you.

☆☆☆

## SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE

*Price* **BM PC £40.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **Lucasfilm/US Gold**

Deep, deep, deep. Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe is a big old game and no mistake. It's also the sequel the critically acclaimed *Their Finest Hour*. The title comes packed with new goodies but brings the same problem of the first game; i.e. the flicky and rather horrible bitmap graphics.

The player is offered the chance to pilot aircraft in a seemingly limitless number of historical missions, shadowing or guarding planes and taking place in actual battles and scenarios of the Second World War.

However, played in a *Wing Commander* style with bitmaps taking the place of the polygons so frequently and successfully used in other flight sims, Luftwaffe will have all but the owners of the fastest machines hammering down the detail level in the attempt to get it to run at an acceptable rate.

Ambitious players can then define their own missions to determine what history would have turned out like if there was just one less Messerschmitt BF109G in a particular combat situation.

Luftwaffe is exactly the sort of game - as distinct from *Wing Commander* - that you actually want to make excuses for. And that's simply down to the fact that under the try-too-hard graphics which actually look pretty absurd every now and again, there is a quite brilliant game.

☆☆☆☆☆

## SILENT SERVICE II

*Price* **Amiga £35.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **MicroProse**

It may have taken five years, but the sequel to one of the most critically acclaimed and publicly admired sim games is finally with us. Silent Service II features all the best bits from the first game as well as a host of original and new doo-dads.

Digitised graphics and sampled sounds simply confirm the Service as a game which is undoubtedly one of the most detailed, accurate and realistic on the market, but new gamers should be warned that, just like life on a real submarine, it's not all walking, er, action.

No. There's a lot of the old *Above Us The Waves* stuff with turning off engines to sneak up on enemy warships without alerting their radar. And as for all that tank blowing stuff. I ask you!

MicroProse are indubitably the outright kings of all things sim., but their policy of increasing the action and minimising the dial-watching as used to such good effect in *F15 Strike Eagle II* would be well extended to this particular title.

For gamers wishing to purchase an accurate sub simulation, rest assured, there is absolutely none better. But those expecting to get their torpedoes off straight away would be better to wait for a more accessible equivalent.

☆☆☆☆☆

## SPACE 1889

*Price* **IBM PC £TBA**
*Genre* **RPG**
*Publisher* **Empire**

This is an RPG which shares many similarities with Origin's *Martian Dreams* in both plot and user interface. However, this lacks the atmosphere and graphic quality of Origin's effort, and the plot is too linear - one often feels as though they're being lead along a fairly narrow path. It's rather simple, and could act as a good intro to the world of RPGs for the novice, but more experienced players may feel the game a little retrograde for today's gaming tastes.

☆☆

## SWITCHBLADE II

*Price* **Atari ST £25.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Gremlin**

Some seven months after appearing on the Amiga, Switchblade II - arguably one of the best arcade shoot-outs in existence - has finally made its transition onto the ST and what a success it's been!

The appeal of this sequel to Gremlin's much underrated original is the distinct Japanese flavour of the graphics. Quite aside from it having more action and weapons and playability than most, Switchblade II features those big-eyed, black-haired characters and transformer-styled robots in a side-on multi-directional scrolling battle to the death.

Control over the central character has more than a little console-feel to it, as he bounces around all over the place firing away with his power-uppable laser rifle.

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A host of different landscapes - some all broody and mechanoid, other quite sunny and happy looking - await those willing to play, each inhabited by it's own particular brand of robot filth.

Perhaps more than the graphics or the gameplay, it's the style of Switchblade II which makes it such a nice game to own. Don't be fooled by the godawful cover artwork into thinking this is just another blast with no heart; it's a thoroughly polished and classy piece of code, and well worth your pennies.

☆☆☆☆☆

## TECHNOCOP

*Price* **Megadrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Razor Soft**

Technocop. What is there to say? This futuristic blaster which deserves a mention, quite apart from anything else for its incredibly messy graphics, was originally produced by Gremlin some years ago now appears on the Razorsoft label. Now Megadrive owners get the chance to play, although it's a matter of debate as to whether they'll actually want to or not. Basically this two-stage racing game is an unremarkable twist on the Chase HQ theme with some side-on scrolling shoot-out bits.

☆☆☆

## THUNDERJAWS

*Price* **Amiga £19.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Domark**

Deep within her subterranean fortress the evil Madame Q has launched a new and dastardly plan - to build an army of genetic mutants to take over the world! This well-meaning but rubbishy conversion is the latest in a long line of Tengen ports from the Doms. To be fair, the majority of the coin-ops have been a long way short of classics themselves, but Domark seem to have an especially tough time wrestling them onto computer format. Witness *A.P.B., S.T.U.N. Runner* and the appalling *Skull and Crossbones*.

Here, the tricky element which has proved to be the conversion's downfall is the tongue-in-cheek *Land of the Giants* graphic style of the original. This very factor, which at least helped the coin-op look a bit more interesting than in fact it was, has simply made the Amiga version look downright cheap.

The players' aim is to work their way through a set of levels combating Madame Q's treacherous forces and collecting hostages along the way. The first stage pits the players in an underwater setting, shooting it out with enemy divers and ferocious sharks alike. Weapons can be collected to improve the firepower, but nothing can improve the diabolical animation and dull-as-dishwater gameplay. From here on in, it's a more straightforward runaround shoot out with the players mincing about gunning down an assortment of mechanoid assailants. Enough! Take it away!

☆

## ZONE WARRIOR

*Price* **Amiga £19.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Electronic Arts**

Destroy the evil aliens in this time-jaunting blast from Electronic Arts. The Geeks have taken control of a secret space satellite and are using it to send themselves back through time, destroying vital elements in the development of Mankind, thus disabling the humans' ability to resist the Geek invasion in years to come.

The player must race back through a host of different time zones and foil the aliens' success, generally by killing a level of left-to-right scrolling monsters.

The impressive intro sequence and the nature of the static graphics are never quite matched by what is really a rather basic shoot-'em-up in the *Turrican* vein. Each stage presents a mission briefing for the player, beginning with the noble feat of saving Ug, inventor of the wheel, from the clutches of aliens and so on. The novelty of using a phased plasma rifle in 40 watt range to blow away innocent cave men and baffled Egyptians is entertaining enough for a while but the shaky gameplay requires a considerably stronger crutch than graphic novelty to support it.

☆☆☆

# COMPETITION

**Right then! That's the end of this month's releases. And now, in order to celebrate, we're proud, and pleased as punch to present this, our end-of-this-month's-new-releases competition! Hurrah!**

**There is £100 (count 'em) worth of software up for grabs for the first lucky, lucky reader who can write to us at the address at the bottom of the page, telling us, in no uncertain terms, the answer to the question which we'll get to any second now.**

**The Question:**

**How many five star games have been reviewed in this month's reviews directory *in total* - not just in the New Releases section?**

**The Address:**

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## AFTERBURNER 2

*Price* **Megadrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Sega**

The epitome of the arcade blast, Afterburner is a classy piece of fluff. And this conversion isn't half bad. Flying an F-14 into the screen, the player must fly through 23 stages, blasting away enemy fighters with his unlimited number of machine gun rounds and limited missiles. Enemy fighters can also be downed by using homing missiles too.

The game is fast - very fast. In fact, in some sections it's as quick as the arcade machine,. Performing a 360 degree roll by baking hard and then banking the other way is an exhilarating experience. And on the whole, in fact, the whole game is pretty exciting fare, even when it's fully understood quite how mindless it all is.

This is the sort of game that the Megadrive was built for. At the other end of the Sonic scale, even though it's another arcade blast, Afterburner does a surprisingly good job of showing exactly what the Megadrive is capable of, so long as you don't look to deep.

Even though the speed is up to scratch, the gameplay certainly doesn't come up smelling of roses. It's the definitive Afterburner 2 conversion, and, just like the coin-op, is heavily flawed.

☆☆☆

## ALIEN STORM

*Price* **Megadrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **SEGA**

Alien Storm is a real stonker in the plot department. Once again aliens are over-running the Earth and it's up to the player (and a possible friend) to kick their scaley butts back to the slime-ridden hole from whence they came. Like the very-similar Golden Axe, three suitably awesome figures - Earth's last line of defence - stand ready to save the world of alien domination. There's the heroically-named Gordon, saucy Karla and the robotic Scooter, who bears an uncanny resemblance to C-3Po (athough he never wielded an electronic bullwhip).

Together they have blast their way through eight levels of alien filth. The hero(es) stroll from left to right basically slaying everything that moves before it gets too close. After a while the view changes to that of an Op Wolf-style game. By guiding crosshairs around the screen the player has to torch everything.

Being a shoot-'em-up one would have thought that more emphasis would have been placed on the weapons but unfortunately they fail to deliver, being rather unimpressive and no fun at all. Can only be more than moderately recommended for two players.

☆☆☆

## BEAST BUSTERS

*Price* **Amiga/Atari ST £25.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **ACTIVISION**

This is a competent conversion of the coin-op which proved so popular to the Uzi-loving arcade goers. It's basically yet another Op Wolf clone but features the welcome twist that instead of wasting terrorists the player (or players) are besieged by a veritable army of the Undead who attempt to stop any leaving the devasated city alive. Borrowing heavily from the Romero horror films, Zombie dogs, Zombie shoppers and all manner of evil creatures can be literally blown into bloody bits of gruesome flesh.

The graphics manage to capture both the look and the feel of the arcade and virtually all the levels are present, but there's no denying that the inevitable substitution of a mouse for the cabinet-mounted Uzi is distinctly unsatisfying. If you haven't already got a game of this genre and don't mind a mindless blast then it might be worth looking into, but otherwise there's not really enough new on offer to warrant purchase. It's a shame, because even the arcade version left the player cold after a couple of turns - it's not supposed to really drag the player in any more than that. Buy for the price, it would have been nice.

☆☆☆

## BONANZA BROS

*Price* **Megadrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **SEGA**

Bonanza Bros proved to be a something of a sizable hit with Joe Public due to its peculiar graphic style and innovative angle on the team-up theme. The player(s) objective are blatantly dishonest: burgle increasingly complex and heavily guarded buildings in Anytown, USA. Having already made a bit of a reputation for themselves, there's a substantial reward on the Bros' heads ensuring that every available law enforcement officer is revoltingly keen to be the one to get them bang to rights.

The game uses a unique split screen to allow players to split up if necessary. Between the two play windows there's a schematic of the building, allowing the players to plan their routes efficeintly so as to grab the goodies and avoid the nasties. Overall the game is a fairly enjoyable romp, with some hilarious cartoonish animation in places adding greatly to the fun, but like many Megadrive games its longevity is questionable.

☆☆☆☆

## CASTLE OF ILLUSION

*Price* **GameGear £29.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **SEGA**

The Evil Mizrabel, jealous of Minnie Mouse's beauty (who are they kidding?), has mousenapped her. Her beloved Mickey must enter the dreaded any mysterious Castle of Illusion to rescue her. Mizrabel's domain consists of five levels and Mickey's task is to find the seven Rainbow Gems on each, all of which boils down to a lot of jumping from platform to platform, picking up and throwing blocks, sliding down slopes and climbing ladders.

Fundamentally it's a Mario clone - and not a bad one at that. There are some original touches, such as the

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Toyland level which scrolls from left to right, which proves pretty disorientating but challenging nontheless. The graphics are very attractive and the sound is superb. In fact, it's games like this that make GameGear owners feel that they've done the right thing in laying out the cash for their colour handheld.

☆☆☆☆☆

## CASTLES

*Price* **IBM PC £34.99**
*Genre* **Strategy**
*Publisher* **INTERPLAY**

Castles takes several gamplay genres and combines them with a healthy dollop of historical authenticity. The game consists of three increasingly-difficult scenarios revolving around the not particularly enthralling sounding task of constructing castles. Each castle consists of wall sections, gateways and towers. There are seven classes of labourer available and the player's main game task is to apply the optimum mix of labourers to each section in an attempt to finish the castle as quickly as possible.

Every so often the player is attacked by the neighbouring Welsh (seems some things never change). Initially the opposition are incredibly weak and their rise in strength is gradual, so defeating them is a lot easier than it ought to be. Although addicitive enough to ensure repeated play until, Castles is minorly flawed in too many ways to achieve classic status.

☆☆☆☆

## CENTURION - DEFENDER OF ROME

*Price* **Megadrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Action Strategy**
*Publisher* **Electronic Arts**

Cast as an aspiring Centurion it's the player's duty to both defend the homeland and expand the Roman Empire as far afield as possible. This megalomaniacal aim is somewhat foiled at first by the fact the player starts with having just a single legion of soldiers and a city of disgruntled citizens to try and keep under control.

The game is a well-judged blend of icon-driven strategy and arcade-style interludes. For example, to keep the subdued provinces happy the player can take part in must engage in chariot races and not tax them to heavily. As the game progresses the armies under your command grow and ships placed at your disposal to take armies to neighbouring shores. If the player's luck is really in he can even have a crack at seducing the voluptuous Cleopatra. Megadrive owners in particular are starved of this type of game, so if your looking for something to exercise your brain a little, you could do far worse than to give this a go.

☆☆☆☆

## CHAMPION OF THE RAJ

*Price* **Amiga £24.99**
*Genre* **Action Strategy**
*Publisher* **PSS/Mirrorsoft**

Set during the time of the British occupation of India, the player assumes the role of leader of one of six feuding factions with the ultimate aim of taking control of the whole country. This can be achieved by building up a powerful army, with which to pound opposing armies into submission or, more peacefully, by staging festivals and whispering in the right ears. The former option requires a bit of forward planning to sensibly allocate taxes for buying troops and equipment. In battle the player can elect to direct the army personally in an arcadish action game, or let the statistics decide the outcome.

Champions of the Raj has a lot of good gameplay ideas wrapped up in appallingly amateurish presentation, poor graphics and truly abysmal sound. The torturously slow and fiddly disc accessing is the icing on a particularly untasty cake. To use the word 'turkey' would be offensive to turkeys.

☆

## CHOPLIFTER 2

*Price* **Gameboy £29.99**
*Genre* **Shoot-'Em-Up**
*Publisher* **Nintendo**

Choplifter first appeared in 1983 via Broderbund and is still fondly remembered today. The player's mission as crack helicopter pilot is to rescue survivors from a horizontally-scrolling warzone. To do this the player must land near the refugees and wait for them to board. This can be quite harrowing experience at times as you're a sitting duck for all the enemy gun installations and planes which constantly lay siege.

The player's copter is equipped with a rapid-firing cannon and a limited number of bombs with which to protect himself. Fast action, challenging game task and a password system help make this one of the best games out on the Gameboy, and a must for any action fans collection.

☆☆☆☆☆

## CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT

*Price* **IBM PC £29.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **Electronic Arts**

Chuck's previous two sims were purely for veggie pacifists, only permitting the player to do such nancy things as perform perfect loops and dives. This time around things have changed considerably, with luvverly GUNS making a welcome appearance. Air Combat allows the player to pilot war planes from any one of three eras: WW2; Korea; and Vietnam. There are a multitude of single missions to fly along with a comprehensive campaign mode boasting over 15 missions. These include the standard 'seek and destroy' forays, protecting bomber formations, and attacking ground targets. Should none of these take your fancy the in-built mission designer is invaluable.

The most useful feature is the ability to replay missions after completion and view it from any angle, allowing the player to save all his most spectacular dogfights and crashes to disc. Even more interesting is the ability to duel planes from different eras, allowing such bizarreness as pitting a Mustang against an F-16. A superbly realistic and fun sim, this currently holds the ACE Benchmark for Simulations. Possible the most entertaining aspect is the way you can pitch state of the art planes against old scruffy crates. Class.

☆☆☆☆☆

## DRAGON CRYSTAL

*Price* **GameGear £29.99**
*Genre* **RPG**
*Publisher* **Sega**

No fussing about with complex plot here. The player is riding his bike one day when he takes a wrong turning down a strange alleyway and ends up in a fantasy world bursting at the seams with dungeons n' dragons. As an RPG the gameplay couldn't really be simpler. The accent is firmly on action, with all the "Take the Rune Ring of Zrax to the Crack of Firetop Mountain" task stuff firmly in the background.

Although competently done, it's a little difficult to see who exactly this game is aimed at. It's far too simple for the typical RPG head, while commuters are likely to get more than a little irate at having to shut down the power just before they complete a level just because they reached their tube stop. But if you've got the time, you'll find that this makes a welcome addition to the GameGear library.

☆☆☆

## EA HOCKEY

*Pirice* **Megadrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Sports Arcade**
*Puiblisher* **Electronic Arts**

Like Kick Off with fighting in, Electronic Arts' Hockey will appeal to everyone. A section of teams from around the globe, each wit their own abilities and weaknesses battle it out in the Ice hockey World League.

Following on from their success with John Madden's Football, EA pull yet another winner our of the bag with this, perhaps their most frenetic title to date.

Having selected the length of game, whether the player wishes to compete in a one-off match or a knock-out, selected his team and that of the enemy, it's game on!

Skating around the rink is simple enough, and control over the puck is surprisingly instinctive. Since the rink is so small and the players can move so swiftly and violently against each other, Ice Hockey is an extremely rapid, high scoring game. Basically, whoever gets the puck from the face-off is

most likely to score. Until, of course, the player gets the hang of the wide variety of tackling moves available to him, from a good honest going-for-the-puck scenario to a full body check.

Rile an opposition player on a too-regular basis, though, and you'd better be ready to put your fist where his mouth is, as one of the features included is brawling. While the rest of your team are trying to do some good, it's possible to clang away at that guy who skated over your shoes for as long as you like!

A graphic and gameplay marvel, EA Hockey is wholeheartedly recommended to one and all. Hooray!

☆☆☆☆☆

## ELF

*Price* **Amiga £25.53**
*Genre* **Arcade Adventure**
*Publisher* **Ocean**

As Cornelius the Elf, it's the players task to rescue his sweetheart Elisa from the pointy-nailed clutches of Necrilous the Not Very Nice. The game takes place over six Tolkien-esque levels filled with platforms, pitfalls, ladders and bridges. Cornelius' magic powder allows him to protect himself from Necrilous' rampant horde of henchcreatures by firing bolts of magic energy. Numerous interest-sustaining spells and power-ups can be bought from the Ye Olde Localle Shoppe using cash picked up along the way.

Each massive maze-like level presents it's own unique set of problems to solve and tasks to achieve, requiring that the player constantly evolve new strategies to deal with them. All in all Elf is a polished high-quality romp, perfect for platform or arcade adventure fan.

☆☆☆☆

## THE EXECUTIONER

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Hawk**

The Executioner is Hawk's attempt to improve on the Asteroids style game. As in most inertia-driven titles, with the player flying through twelve galaxy sectors, blasting away rocks and then using fiscal benefits to purchase bigger and better weapons systems for your ship.

Dotted around the landscapes are pods which shot at the player and occasionally launch ships. Also to be found are fuel pods which must be collected if further play is to be enjoyed.

Initially, the Executioner is quite enjoyable, but soon tedium takes over. There just isn't enough gameplay variety to bring the player back for more. Also, the fact that a single alien missile can kill the player outright is far from encouraging. After the long struggle to work your way to the second stage, the player may well find himself whether he can really be bothered to continue.

The potential of the game simply hasn't been realised. The graphics are perfectly acceptable, but nothing to write home about, and the play of the game and in particular the behaviour of the player's craft itself is jerky and unpleasant. Boo.

☆☆☆

## F-117A: STEALTH FIGHTER 2

*Price* **IBM PC £39.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **MicroProse**

Your chance to pilot the Ugliest Plane in The World is a more inspiring one than you may think, although it's uncertain as to whether owners of the previous Stealth game will actually need this instalment in the series.

Opting to either pilot a realistic F-117A or an artificially enhanced 'Microprose' version, the player can enter his chosen war scenario, be it Cold, Limited or Conventional and then choose a particular location for the combat to take place. The number of combat arenas has been radically increased. Nine battlefields, including those from F-19, F-15 2 and some newies have been thrown in for good measure.

Graphically, F-117A is a marvel, with graduated skylines, complex objects etc. There are four detail levels for owners with slower machines. Be


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warned, even on a 20Mhz 286, the frame rate is hardly silky-smooth.

There's no denying that F-117A is a superb flight sim, and Microprose's best yet. However, despite the radically overhauled graphics and increased number of combat arenas, one does wonder whether there's enough new in the gameplay to make it a vital purchase to owners of the original F-19.

☆☆☆☆

## F-14 TOMCAT

*Price* **IBM PC £TBA**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **Activision**

There's no shortage of flight sims on the PC, but Activision's release may appeal to some. The game lets the player fly a series of missions around the Strait of Hormuz. The player can either pile straight into the action or start at the bottom and slowly work his way up through a full Navy career. After a good performance in a series of missions the player get transferred to the Naval Fighter Weapons School better known as the home of the infamous 'Top Guns'. Weaponry available is the usual mix of Sparrows, Sidewinders and Phoenix missiles, along with cannon for close in work. There isn't really much emphasis on realism in F-14 Tomcat, and to be honest it really hasn't got much to offer players over other similar sims. In the final analysis, it's a satisfying enough effort without too much excess baggage.

☆☆☆☆

## F-ZERO

*Price* **Super Famicom £34.99** Import
*Genre* **Racing Game**
*Publisher* **Nintendo**

F-Zero takes advantage of the Famicom's built-in background manipulation capabilities to create one of the fastest and smoothest illusions of 3D yet seen, if a little lacking in roadside detail. Simply put, F-Zero is a race game, with the track viewed from behind and slightly above the player's vehicle. At first, despite the impressive 3D, F-Zero appears to offer little over the myriad of other race games about, but after a few games its qualities shine through.

The excellent control over the craft is more precise than in any other race game. As well as accelerate, brake, left and right controls, one can also use the Famicom controller's two as banking switches. This degree of precision means you can race your craft like a cross between a high-speed hovercraft and a rally car. F-Zero may not look anything special, but it's genuinely one of those games that has to be experienced to be believed.

☆☆☆☆

## FRENETIC

*Price* **Amiga £20.99**
*Genre* **Shoot-'Em-Up**
*Publisher* **Core Design**

Hot on the heels of Warzone, Core release this vertically shoot-'em-up which draws its inspiration from just about every other blaster ever released. To anyone more than half-way familiar with the genre the gameplay holds few surprises - the screen scrolls slowly down while wave after wave after wave of eminently blastable alien creatures swarm on-screen. The now-standard power-ups can be collected by destroying various special aliens or weapons pods as they appear. At the end of each of the eight levels there's the obligatory huge meany that takes a huge amount of shots to put out of action.

Frenetic is a competently-executed game that lacks that spark of novelty to lift it out of the run-of-the-mill. The alien sprites are large, fast and mean, the action is non-stop and highly demanding at times. The most annoying niggle is the way that power-ups are lost when the player's ship is destroyed, leaving the player naked before the alien onslaught. Unless you've already got the superlative SWIV, this is a fair buy.

☆☆☆

## GHOST BATTLE

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Thalion**

Ghost Battle is a jumpin' n' thumpin' affair that borrows more than a few elements from Ghosts n 'Goblins. The player is a hero who has to enter an evil demon's kingdom in an attempt to rescue his kidnapped girlfriend. On each level it's ladders, platforms, graveyards and underground caverns all the way through each level, at the end of which there's is a big boss baddy to be defeated.

There are the usual extra weapons to collect, and on later levels keys and various tools that must be used on various pieces of machinery appear to add much-needed depth to the otherwise shallow gameplay. Ghost Battle is unimpressive graphically and sonically, and play is sluggish. Not one for the top of the 'must get' list.

☆☆

## G-LOC

*Price* ***GameGear £29.99***
*Genre* ***Arcade Blast***
*Publisher* ***SEGA***

If you're expecting anything vaguely reminiscent of the Sega coin-op you can forget it. No, I tell a lie - they both involve planes, but that's where the similarities end. The player controls a state-of-the-art jet fighter in a wartorn world of the future, who must embark on various missions to destroy enemy planes, tanks and warships. Controls are easy to get to grips with and it's not long after take-off before the radar lights up like a mas tree due to the heavy enemy activity. If these are planes they'll sweep behind in an attempt to down you with some missiles. The ships and tanks in the game act as sitting ducks and aren't really much problem. The game is enjoyable for a few hours but after a while the interest really begins to wane.

☆☆

## GOLF

*Price* **GameGear £29.99**
*Genre* **Sport Simulation**
*Publisher* **Sega**

Sega have chosen a bird's eye view for this offering, and it works quite well. Simplicity is the key word here and though there's a fair bit of messing about before play starts it's nothing too taxing. To play a shot the player selects a club and then chooses where to strike the ball (for hook and slice shots), which direction to hit it and how much power to use. Even though the scale of the game is small, there is enough to think about to maintain interest and allow for some genuine skill to be used, and the courses are no pitch n' putt numbers either. There are quite a few nice touches that add to the game, such as four player mode and skill selection. A good game that's worth looking into.

☆☆☆☆

## HALLEY WARS

*Price* **GameGear £29.99** Import
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Taito**

Given the fact that the vast majority of the software currently available for the GameGear doesn't even come close to doing the impressive handheld justice, Halley Wars comes as a breath of particularly refreshing air. Every handheld need its top-flight shoot-'em-up - the GameBoy has Nemesis, the Lynx has Gates of Zendocon - and now the 'Gear's got a game that's arguably better than the pair of them. It wins no points in the originality stakes, being your basic space-based Xenon-style vertical blaster with all the standard pick-ups and level guardians, but it scores highly on execution, offering fine playability, colourful graphics, smooth animation and surprisingly impressive sound. The game's only major limitation is that, due to the machine's limitations, it can't produce the flashy effects that similar games on more powerful machines often rely on to hold the player's interest, so Halley Wars must depend on gameplay alone - and there's insufficient variety there to provide that all-important urge to progress to the later levels.

Also, it's a shame that the game is actually a bit easy and, as they say when trying to pad out a column right at the end of an issue, seasoned gamesplayers may find the long-term challenge somewhat lacking. That aside, it's still a fine blaster and undoubtedly one of the better GameGear titles so far - just don't expect to be playing it in a year's time.

☆☆☆☆

## HATRIS

*Price* **GameBoy £29.99** Import
*Genre* **Puzzle**
*Publisher* **Bullet-Proof Software**

Alexy Pajitnov is the fiendish mind behind the time-devouringly addictive Tetris. Now he's back with Hatris which, like it's forebear, is deceptively simple in concept. Pairs of different hats fall down six 'lanes'. By moving the pair left or right and swapping the tumbling hats' position the player has to try and stack hats of the same type. Stack five hats together and they disappear. The longer the player survives the faster the hats fall. The game is over when a stack reaches the line at the top of the screen. A 'Hatris' is scored when two stacks are completed at the same time. The players reward is a fireball which can be used to vaporise the top hat of a column. Alternatively the player can collect three fireballs and to earn a helmet which can be used to crush all the hats in one lane.

Hatris takes a while to get into but eventually becomes as engrossing and addictive as its illustrious forbear. Recommended to all Tetris addicts (and who isn't?).

☆☆☆☆☆

## HEART OF CHINA

*Price* **IBM PC £40.85**
*Genre* **Adventure**
*Publisher* **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

Many games allude to the title of 'interactive movie' but very few actually deliver the goods. Fortunately Heart of China is one of the few games which is actually deserving of that lofty title. Set in the late 1920s, the game puts the player in the shoes of troubleshooter 'Lucky' Jake Masters. Asked to find the wealthy society gal Kate Lomax, he soon ends up in the Far East.

Unlike most games it doesn't concentrate solely on one character, allowing the player to switch between the members of the cast and adding greatly to its film-like atmosphere. Also the numerous puzzles can be solved from a variety of different angles. Heart Of China also has multiple endings which makes the game enjoyable to play even when completed. To round it all off nicely there are also some polished arcade sequences, though fortunately these can be skipped if the idea doesn't appeal. If you like anything mildly adventurish then Heart of China comes highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆☆

## HEROQUEST

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **RPG**
*Publisher* **Gremlin**

Hero Quest was one of the best-selling boardgames of last year, and Gremlin look set to capitalise on that success with its excellent computer conversion. A game for one to four people, players can select to be one of four characters (or all if playing alone): Wizard (powerful magic, pathetic strength); Elf (little magic, normal strength); Dwarf (good strength, can spot traps); and finally Barbarian (amazing strength).

The game plays identically to its tabletop counterpart. Players must complete fourteen quests set in a series of monster-infested dungeons, culminating in a showdown with ArchMage Morcar. All controls are via the mouse using icons and menus. Players move in turns, with each location, corridor and room split into movement squares. During the adventures players collect a variety of items ranging from gold to magic weapons to aid them on their adventures. Highly polished, the excellent isometric graphics, atmospheric soundtracks and superb attention to detail make this a worthy addition to the RPG genre.

☆☆☆☆

## IN YOUR FACE

*Price* **GameBoy £29.99** Import
*Genre* **Sport Game**
*Publisher* **Jaleco**

In Your Face is a basketball game which boasts some superb presentation. It has only one skill level, but four players of differing characteristics to choose from. The gameplay is simplistic: the player simply guides his on-screen alter-ego around the court using the joypad, and stealing the ball is achieved


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by simply running into the opponent. This makes the game easy to get into but provides little lastability. There's also a two-on-two option for some Kick Off style action (but not anywhere near as good).

The game's major problem is the play area - it's bigger than the screen which means the view is continually scrolling. On other machines this is not a serious thing but the Gameboy screen blurs the images terribly. Nothing special, In Your Face is definitely one to leave On The Shelf.

☆☆

## JAMES 'BUSTER' DOUGLAS BOXING

*Price* **Megadrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Sport Arcade**
*Pulisher* **Megadrive**

Oh dear. In the light of infinitely superior beat-'em-up games, James Buster Douglas is not so much on the ropes as on the stretcher.

Side-on-presentation Boxing games rely on speed, presentation and a wide enough number of moves to keep the player convinced that he can improve his technique. Unfortunately, Buster can offer us none of these elements, as the truly crappy fight scenes are more likely to cause a submission through sheer tedium than anything else.

Ridiculous and thoroughly unappealing graphics of the boxers shuffle towards each other and then furiously flail away with high and low blows until one of them falls over. You may feel the same way about boxing, but believe me, this is poor.

And for a fight game, it commits the cardinal sin of simply being too easy. Just by stabbing away at the fire button faster than your opponent, it's possible to win. There's no skill involved here. Crappy nonsense.

☆

## JETFIGHTER 2

*Price* **IBM PC £39.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **Velocity/US Gold**

In a crowded market, Jetfighter 2 really stands out from the crowd. The unlikely plot centres the invasion of America's West Coast by a confederation of Latin American countries. Full-scale retaliation is out of the question, so small tactical strikes are the order of the day. There are four planes available with which to fly the missions: F-14; F-16; F-18; and the Top Secret F-23D 'Black Widow', a plane that combines the handling characteristics of an F-16 with the Stealth capabilities of the F-117A. It's advanced technology gives the player an edge over the enemy.

Graphics are among the best yet seen on the PC, being both fast and impressively shaded. Sound is nothing too hot, but adequate. The accent is more on action than simulation, making this one of the most exciting if not aerodynamically accurate sims available.

☆☆☆☆☆

## JIMMY WHITE'S WHIRLWIND SNOOKER

*Price* **Atari ST £24.99**
*Genre* **Sport Simulation**
*Publisher* **Virgin Games**

Archer Maclean, veteran programmer of IK+ and Dropzone, is probably the last person you'd expect to write a snooker sim. Cue games have been around since the beginning of computer gaming - a few coloured shapes, some angle-of-deflection algorithms and away you go. But even with the advent of 3D graphics none of them have really had any element of realism.

Until now. The table is viewed from behind the cue ball so the player can line up shots as if on a real table. The view can be rotated through various axes and zoomed in so the player can see from virtually every angle conceivable. The ball movement is accurate, without balls stopping for no reason, or going off at impossible angles.

Two player games are the best, but four levels of computer opponent are available for the lone gamer. As the player progresses more sophisticated tactics can be incorporated, like positional play. Swerve, stun, screw and every type of spin are all possible, and are vital for snookering opponents. The end result of JWWS's comprehensive and realistic approach to recreating snooker is the most authentic sports simulation to date.

☆☆☆☆☆

## KA•GE•KI

*Price* **MegaDrive £39.99**
*Genre* **Beat-'Em-Up**
*Publisher* **Sega**

The player is cast as a large-headed hero (who looks like a Thunderbird puppet on steroids), who must slowly battle his way through a multi-story tower block in an attempt to reach the top. (Why, we don't know.) The lift being out of order means you have to go through each level individually, a task not made easier by the other big-headed thugs residing there.

For a beat-'em-up Ka•Ge•Ki is distinctly underpowered. The range of moves is limited: apart from moving the player can punch, jab, jump and... er... that's it. Ka•Ge•Ki leaves a lot to be desired, the graphics are just plain ugly, backdrops dull, though sound is okay but not much else. The easy gameplay is substandard and the game has no real redeeming features. There are better games available.

☆☆

## LOGICAL

*Price* **Amiga/Atari/IBM PC £24.99**
*Genre* **Puzzle**
*Publisher* **Rainbow Arts**

Logical is a bit of a rarity, a thought provoking fast-action game which is genuinely as addictive as the blurb claims. The game is as follows; along the top of a screen runs a track; along the track come coloured marbles which drop down channels into revolving disks., each disk has four marble slots, and is connected to other disks by further channels.

Your task is rotate the disks (by clicking with the right M.B.) and launch marbles (click left) in such a way that each disk becomes filed with four marbles of the same colour. As always it sounds too simple but there are various complications and additions that spice up the gameplay, such as a time limits, colour gates, teleporters and a various other touches. The graphics are clear and well defined, and the sound too is good with some nice tunes and effects. With 99 levels (and a password system!) this should keep any puzzler addicted for a fair while.

☆☆☆☆

## MAGIC POCKETS

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Renegade**

The Bitmaps much hyped and opinion-splitting latest is a strange old affair. It looks great, has a simple enough premise and is regarded by many to be a piece of class action. To our minds, however, it just doesn't hang together.

The monsters in Bitmapland or somewhere have stolen the Bitmap Kid's toys. The Bitmap kid must journey through four worlds, retrieving his toys and overcoming a host of new and exciting challenges along the way.

Imagine Mario crossed with Speedball and that's what you get. Nearly. You get a peculiar Bitmap version of Mario cuteness which is actually quite irritating, a sub-standard control interface which is utterly charmless and leads to many stick-hurling incidents, and one of the most unnecessarily over-complicated score/power-up systems on the planet.

To help the kid in his side-on scrolling quest around the four worlds, power ups are available is the correct object collection procedures are followed. Having to sit down and work out how the system works when the very point is that these games are instinctive is a mere trifle compared to the fury instilled in the player who has to wait for the pick-up points to finish bouncing before he can collect them, ruining any fluidity or fun. Stop, start. Stop start. Stop.

☆☆☆

## MANCHESTER UNITED EUROPE

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Sport Game**
*Publisher* **Krisalis**

With Kick Off 2 currently holding the football crown, it's a brave company that launches yet another footy game on to the market. Mind you, with the original game selling over a thousand copies, maybe Krisalis are not taking such a risk after all. The player can

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TO ANY READERS WHO HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CONTACT US DUE TO PROBLEMS WITH THE PHONELINES PRINTED IN OUR PREVIOUS ADVERTS. THESE HAVE BEEN RESOLVED AND WE HOPE THAT WE HAVEN'T INCONVIENCED YOU TOO MUCH.

compete in either the UEFA Cup, European Cup or the Cup Winner's Cup. Before a match the player can adjust formation, tactics and composition which due to user-friendliness is a pretty painless process. However impatient gamers will be pleased to know that this can all be skipped.

The game is displayed in pseudo-3D which allows for some decent player animation and graphic frills. As is traditional the player nearest the ball has control, and there's a huge variety of moves available including sliding tackles, variable power shots, aftertouch, chips to the side, as well as volleys, headers, etc. One minor gripe is the fact that it's difficult to see where the ball is going to land due to view point. MU Europe isn't Kick Off 3 but it is a good footy game for those looking for something different.

☆☆☆☆

## MARTIAN DREAMS

*Price* **IBM PC £36.99**
*Genre* **RPG**
*Publisher* **Origin/Mindscape**

Imagine all the 19th Century characters that you'd most like to meet, plunk them all in an experimental spaceship, and then - for added SF interest - blast them to Mars. The result a mesmerising blend of The Forbidden Planet and Murder On The Orient Express with a small cast of celebrity oddballs wondering around Mars.

The player's objective is to rescue these worthies from the Red Planet. Along with companions Sigmund Freud, Dr Blood, and Nikola Tesla, the player must get back to Earth (not easy with a strange and hostile planet), which entails making sense of the extinct Martians' techno-culture and discovering why they died out... Or did they?

The Martian Dreams game interface is superb - the game is entirely mouse controlled, although keyboard commands can be used for shortcuts. The game is instantly playable thanks to some forethought by the programmers, because the game provides the player with enough clues to get off to a quick start. The character interaction system works very well giving the player the ability to have some quite lengthy conversations. Some really impressive graphics combined with excellent gameplay and involving scenario result in one of the better RPG games in recent years

☆☆☆☆☆

## MARVEL LAND

*Price* **Megadrive £34.99** Import
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Namco**

There's nothing wrong with cutesy or simplistic graphics - what we at ACE object to is the downright badly-drawn variety as sported in Namco's latest console effort. But the old dictum of never judging a book by its cover is proved right by playing the game, whereupon it becomes apparent that despite the visuals, which look like they've been produced by a pre-school child armed with a blunt crayon, Marvel Land isn't bad at all. It's a rather obvious Mario clone, and while it's not a patch on Nintendo's classic (but then what is?) it's certainly one of the better attempts. The Japanese dialogue which appears in some of the subgames takes a bit of fathoming out, but that's the standard price paid for playing imported games, and in this case at least it doesn't affect the fun too much. Many Megadrive owners may be offended even at the prospect of buying a game that looks this bad for their beloved technical wonder, but those who want value for their money will find this to be a better bet than the flashy-looking dirge that forms a large part of the Megadrive's software base. Recommended.

☆☆☆☆

## MAUPITI ISLAND

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Adventure**
*Publisher* **Lankhor**

The latest in a line of adventures starring fictional gallic detective Jerome Lange, Maupiti Island is a murder mystery-type affair in the same vein as Delphine's excellent Cruise For A Corpse. This effort, however, lacks much of that game's imagination and sparkle, and though there's a very complex storyline, packed with clues and suspects, and all set on a remote Caribbean paradise, there seems to be little to really see or do, and as such there's an uncomfortable claustrophobic atmosphere. Given the potential offered by the plot and its tropical setting, Maupiti Island could have been a lot better and more interesting than it actually is, and the over-use of impressive samples and poor CLI speech serves only to put the player off. The game's presented well, with an effective menu-driven parser and lots of neat touches, but given the somewhat unreasonable way in which the player is asked to find clues (it's more often down to finding a pixel hidden somewhere in a cluttered screen than using any real deductive reasoning), it's unlikely that anybody will find much to enjoy here. Cruise is a much better bet for any would-be Maigrets out there. Great music though.

☆☆

## MEGA LO MANIA

*Price* **Amiga £24.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Strategy**
*Publisher* **Mirrorsoft**

Released amid a bunch of God-sims that are still coming thick and fast, Mirrorsoft's offering has fared better than most, steering sufficiently clear of the Big Daddy Populous while not being afraid to borrow little bits here and there where appropriate.

Set in an alternate universe, Mega lo Mania is all about the quest for power. Power over a set of worlds, each made up from a suite of islands, to be precise. New worlds are formed and intelligent life is placed upon them, upon which interstellar freeloaders descend and try to seize the reigns of power for themselves.

The conflict arises, needless to say, when more than one freeloader takes a shine to a particular island. Since each area can only have one ruler, a campaign of imperialism begins, with each player trying to use the forces at his disposal to overthrow the others.

Each island exists within its own time period, and the rate of development, intelligence and so on of its inhabitants is governed accordingly. Players quick to invest time in invention and the refining of natural elements, rather than simply running around hitting the others with sticks are more likely to succeed.

☆☆☆☆☆

## MERCS

*Price* **Amiga/Atari ST £25.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **US Gold**

While on a peace mission to central Africa, the President of the United States has been kidnapped by a notorious band of heavily-armed rebels. For to diplomatic reasons his recovery has to be covert with a maximum of two operatives - the player and a friend. The game is a conversion of the CapCom's arcade shoot-'em-up and retains the eight-way scrolling (albeit a bit jerkily, especially on the ST). By virtue of two blank areas on either side of the screen the play area has been reduced to a strip down the middle of the screen. In one-player mode this is fine, but in two-player mode things gets very crowded.

The action quotient is of a very high level, with loadsa soldiers to mow down and tanks to blow up. Also nice is the ability to blast away huge chunks of the scenery with some booming explosions. If you like your action fast and frantic then this is probably for you, but if you're usually going to be playing two player then Core Design's Warzone is probably a better bet.

☆☆☆☆

## MICROPROSE GOLF

*Price* **Atari ST £34.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **MicroProse**

The unmistakable Microprose style comes to visit the golfing genre (we wonder why) with a reasonable amount of success. It's all extremely competent stuff but...

Striking a happy medium between an arcade-orientated approach of such winners as Links and Leaderboard and their own number-friendly abilities, Microprose can offer the player the chance to fiddle around with every aspect of the game, from the size of his club right down to the positioning of his feet or how high the tee is.

Birds-eye maps of the current hole give the player a rough estimate as to what he's about, with the computerised caddy suggesting the best club for the shot. From here, the bitmapped graph-

ics give way to workmanlike polygon landscapes and the familiar strength vs accuracy-o-meter hitting routines.

The struck ball is then followed down the course in jerky 3D until it lands and the whole business can start again.

All bases are covered and the presentation for the most part is top-hole (ho ho), but the big rewards are reserved for players willing to put in enough hours to perfect their golfing ability rather than instant-gratification fiends.

☆☆☆☆

## NBA ALL-STAR CHALLENGE

*Price* **GameBoy £29.99**
*Genre* **Sport Simulation**
*Publisher* **LJN**

Yet another Gameboy one-on-one basketball game. This succeeds over In Your Face by virtue of keeping all the action on one static screen and thus avoiding the terrible blurring of Jaleco's offering. In addition, there are five subgames to take part in, none of which are particularly different to 'normal' basketball but they at least at some variety. NBA requires far more skill to play than IYF because of the more complex moves which, although making it harder to learn, at least makes the game more skill based and thus more rewarding in the long run. It's hardly Tetris, but a worthwhile purchase nonetheless.

☆☆☆☆

## PREHISTORIK

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £19.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Titus/Entertainment Int.**

Yet another game that persists in spreading the myth that the cavemen existed at the same time as the dinosaurs. This one puts the player in the role of Rik, a hairy hunter with a bottomless pit of a stomach. Rik has to guided around his flick-scrolling antediluvian world in the search for food. Rik's comestibles come in either passive (pre-killed and pre-cooked and just ready to be eaten) or active (dinosaurs that have to be whacked over the head before they can be consumed) form. It's this latter food class, along with the pits and spikes that have to be jumped, that provide the game's main obstacles. At the end of each level, assuming Rik's eaten enough, there's a boxing match against a giant dino before progress onto the next level can occur.

Prehistorik has little to recommend it in any department. The sprites are cute-ish but very small, the flick-scrolling is decidedly 8-bit and sound merely perfunctory. And considering that so little is moving on the many dull-to-get-through screens, the action is slow. The pixel-perfect nature of much of the jumping doesn't help things either. Avoid.

☆☆

## ROBIN HOOD

*Price* **IBM PC £30.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Strategy**
*Publisher* **Millenium**

Mercilessly coat-tailing the publicity of the recent batch of Lincoln green movies, Millenium's completely unlicensed version of the tale is surprisingly entertaining.

Presented in Populous style, the game sticks to the classic storyline of Robin of Locksley being booted out of his lands by the evil Sherrif of Nottingham, deserted by his people and left to fend for himself.

The player, taking the title role of course, must assemble a band of merry men and set about doing away with the nasty old sheriff once and for all. An equally important goal for the player is to convince all the peasants and other inhabitants of the forest and its environs that Rob isn't the murdering thieving blaggard that the Sherrif has described to them but is a lovely kind hearted soul.

Aside from combat and object-seeking, there's a refreshing amount of genuinely funny dialogue in the game too, with the characters camping up their roles to the best of their ability.

It's an extremely enjoyable and innovative arcade adventure cum strategy cum role playing game who's worst failing could be that the plot is so familiar the player is compelled to play through to the very end as soon as he physically can, thus diminishing the appeal of return visits.

☆☆☆☆


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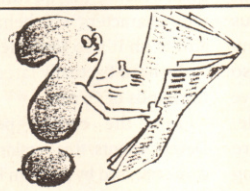

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## R-TYPE 2

*Price* **Amiga/Atari ST £25.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Activision**

R-Type was the forerunner to many of today's shoot-'em-ups, and introduced many of the features that players now take for granted in a half-decent blaster, such as power ups and end-of-level meanies. Rather than come up with a new idea for its sequel coin-op, Irem chose to keep to the much the same formula, whcih is not a bad thing when you consider it.

There are six horizontally-scrolling levels, each with its own style of graphics, all of which are excellent (although ST owners may be a bit peeved by the ropey scrolling). The music is suitably spacey, and polishes off the game. Being very similar to the original, one wonders whether buyers of that will want to fork out £25 for what amounts to a jumped-up data disc of new levels. However, newcomers to the R-Type legend are in for a treat.

☆☆☆☆ (Amiga) ☆☆☆ (ST)

## SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

*Price* **Amiga/Atari/PC £25.99/£29.99**
*Genre* **Adventure**
*Publisher* **Lucasfilm/US Gold**

Monkey Island is the latest in Lucasfilm's celebrated series of 'animated graphic adventures'. The player is Guy Threepwood, a young man intent on becoming a pirate. To do so he must complete three mini-quests during which the player slowly becomes involved in more and more hazardous interaction with characters both beautiful, evil and absurd. The game also contains several sub-plots which serve to make the game more enjoyable, which range from simple treasure quests to a massive objective involving a Grand Pirate from Hell.

The graphics are pretty impressive, using a variety of 'camera angles', such as close ups when conversing with characters and long shots of the landscape when Guy travels from place to place. The music adds a lot to the game and provides real atmosphere in some scenes - the Tavern owes almost all of its potency to the accompanying soundtrack. Monkey Island is easy to play due to good use of the mouse and single key commands, and along with the presentation combine to make this an excellent game which deserves its place on the software shelf of any adventurer.

☆☆☆☆☆

## SHINOBI

*Price* **GameGear £29.99**
*Genre* **Beat-'Em-Up**
*Publisher* **Sega**

Shinobi is back! Unfortunately he's lost the canine companion of his previous adventure and must traverse all four levels alone in an attempt to rescue his kidnapped buddies. The action is divided into two distinct styles: kicking in baddies and jumping platforms across a horizontally-scrolling landscape and, for added variety, kicking in baddies and jumping platforms across an eight-way scrolling landscape! The action gets a bit repetitive, and Shinobi himself is pretty poorly equipped for some of the tougher baddies around. An essential purchase - but for Shinobi fans only.

☆☆☆

## THE SIMPSONS

*Price* **Amiga £25.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Ocean**

This conversion of the TV-show and marketing phenomenon which is really really funny honestly no really it's great because they're funny little cartoon characters who behave like real adults oh it's so hysterical oh ho ho really hasn't actually fared too well at the hands of Ocean.

From the coding pen of Arc Developments, this version of the NES game released by Acclaim has lost even the charm of the cartoon and on top of all that, it isn't a particularly good game either.

Space mutants have landed in the sleepy American town of Springfield and are planning to build a weapon which will help them take over the entire planet.

The player, taking the role of Bart must travel around Springfield. Basically, Bart must destroy or deface all the every day elements in Springfield which the Mutants are using to construct their space weapon.

Ocean's attempt to create something a bit more depthy than a straightforward arcade game is commendable, but the result is frustrating because the sloppy elements of game design just make it too difficult to play.

It's too easy for Bart to die through no real fault of the player, and the control method is ineffective. Shame.

☆☆☆

## SLIDERS

*Price* **Amiga, ST £19.99**
*Genre* **Sports Arcade**
*Publisher* **Palace**

The French can always be relied upon when it comes to producing novel, if not particularly playable games - and Sliders is no exception. It's sort of a weird cross between Speedball and Marble Madness, where two player-controlled spheres fight it out over a series of isometric arenas with the objective of hitting the opponent's goal zone with a tiny ball.

In theory it's a great idea, but somewhere along the line the basic premise has been lost, swamped under a sea of unpleasant control modes and the overuse of supposedly game-enhancing features such as trampolines, attractors and magnetic tiles.

The result is sometimes fun, but for the most part annoying, and even a whole screen full of game options and adjusters can't do much to alleviate the frustration.

The real shame is that sometimes - but only very briefly - it's actually a lot of fun, and it's during those moments the player realises how good the game could have been if the designers hadn't got carried away with all the extras.

It's very fast, very slick - but ultimately unrewarding, no matter how much prowess and determination the player may possess.

It's a weird one, because even in two-player mode, it leaves the player with a "so-what" sort of feeling which inspires nothing more than disk removal and in the drawer scenarios.

☆☆☆

## SNEAKY SNAKES

*Price* **GameBoy £29.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Rare**

From the people who used to churn out those Knightlore games (remember them) comes Sneaky Snakes, an exercise in excellent control and little depth. A female snake has been kidnapped by the Nasty Nibbler and the player taking the role of either Genghis or Atilla must explore the Nibblers hazard-laden landscape eating enough food to make them big enough to activate floor switches which open doors through to the later levels.

It may not sound quite as much fun as boiling one's head but actually it's not that bad. Apart from the wonky idea of the whole thing, the playing of the game is pretty good. Control over the snake is excellent and all inertia-driven. Food is obtained by bouncing on little plates which lie all over the floor or waiting around by plants which spew out balloons.

The weight of the snake is denoted by its length. Unfortunately, once he's long enough to activate the switch to go through to the next level, he's also long enough to be more easily hit and hurt by the nasty things in the landscape. Although the game never quite matches up to the quality of the control method, there's probably just enough stupid novelty value here to justify a purchase.

☆☆☆

## SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

*Price* **MegaDrive £34.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Sega**

Sonic is on a mission to rescue his fluffy chums from the clutches of evil Doctor Eggman. Perils and platforms are the order of the day, but the emphasis is has been placed firmly on variety too, with plenty of shades of Rick Dangerous and Strider to spot along the way.

Our prickly hero can rid himself of nasties by either jumping on their heads, or rolling up into a ball and spinning at supersonic speed to knock them

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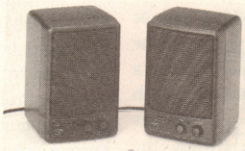

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out of his way. The most important objects in Sonic's world are gold rings. These act as a safety buffer for contact with the meanies - one touch causes all Sonic's coins to spray out, while contact without any coins results in the loss of one of Sonic's three lives. These can be traded for a life once a hundred have been collected.

Spread around each of the HUGE levels are a myriad of useful objects that deliver some temporary bonuses such as invulnerability and speed-shoes.

The impressive graphics are by far the best yet seen on the Megadrive, being smooth, colourful and move at speeds that leave you slack-jawed. Along with the sonics (Oh per-leese!) and playability to match, this is a game that'll keep you playing until those early hours. If there's one MegaDrive game you buy this year then this is should be it.

☆☆☆☆☆

## SUPER PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL

*Price* **Super Famicom £54.99** Import
*Genre* **Sport Simulation**
*Publisher* **Jaleco**

The Great American Sport makes it onto the Famicom with a certain amount of style. A game for one or two players, it's viewed in two very different ways. When the ball is pitched, the players view the action in close-up from just behind the pitcher. The pitching player can adjust the power and angle of his pitch using the joypad. The batting player then has to strike the ball by doing similar. As the ball sails into the air the view cuts to a scrolling park view.

Using the radar in the corner of the screen the pitching player has to guide one of his outfield to catch the ball, while the batting player has to decide whether to risk pushing his men round the bases one more time. Er... just like the real thing, actually.

As a simulation, Baseball is fine. The graphics are a bit rainy at times, but the all-important gameplay is marvellous - almost relaxing at times. Although a rather simple game, with the associated risk of early boredom (and at nearly sixty quid for the cartridge that's a fairly big risk), Baseball is entertaining enough to be worth consideration.

☆☆☆☆

## SUPER R-TYPE

*Price* **Super Famicom £50** Import
*Genre* **Arcade Blaster**
*Publisher* **Irem**

Apart from Gradius III, shoot-'em-ups on the Famicom are a little thin on the ground, so Super R-Type comes as a real treat. Basically it's R-Type 2 with some shiny brass knobs on. Irem has added a couple of new worlds - the first one has you blasting through a space minefield - but it's still the game we all know and love. With impressive aesthetics and matching sound, it's the game Famicom owners have been waiting for.

☆☆☆☆☆

## TAIL GATOR

*Price* **GameBoy £29.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Natsume**

Slot Tail Gator into your Gameboy and you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd accidentally picked up a Game and Watch on the way out of the house instead. This Manic Miner rip off features an alligator trudging through a bunch of levels of the Moberry kingdom, trying to dispatch the monsters who have invaded.

Charly (the alligator) must flick away the monsters using his tail. Chests occasionally yield bonuses or smart bombs which will clear the entire screen of bad guys. But we all know the sort of chest that Charly is really interested in. Yes! The chests with the key which will lead him off the level.

Control over the alligator is bad enough. He waddles along (I'm perfectly aware that alligators can't move that swiftly on their hind legs) at the most ridiculous sloth-like rate.

We've really moved on from games where the entire objective is to get off the current screen by collecting a key, or at least everyone except Natsume have. For the merest instant of a second of a moment, Tail Gator looks as if it could be one of those simple-yet-addictive games which look rubbish buy play like a dream. But it isn't. So don't be fooled.

☆

## THUNDERHAWK

*Price* **Amiga £30.99**
*Genre* **Simulation**
*Publisher* **Core Design**

Most flight sims require a good deal of practice before any reward can be garnered from them. All those keyboard controls and miscellaneous aircraft functions do quite a lot to put off anyone looking for a quick blast. Core Design have seen this gap in the market, and more than adequately filled it with Thunderhawk. All control is via the mouse, which makes everything, from weapon selection to helicopter control to target tracking, quick and easy. It's a welcome change from the usual memory test of clicks and non-clicks

The game itself is broken up into a series of campaigns, each preceded by a graphic briefing sequence indicating targets and terrain type. Before taking to the sky the player must select the appropriate armament for the Thunderhawk, although there's a default option if this seems too much of a chore.

What makes the game a treat is the handling of the helicopter. The controls make flying intuitive, letting the player get on with the mission rather than battling to stay airborne. Graphics are pretty smooth and move at a fair pace, although there isn't much background scenery. If you've never been tempted to try a flight sim then perhaps this is the game to change your attitude.

☆☆☆☆☆

## UTOPIA

*Price* **Amiga £29.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Strategy**
*Publisher* **Gremlin**

The quality of life on earth, let's face it, sucks. And the world is screwed up so bad that nothing anyone can do can save it. We need to start again.

This is the premise of Utopia, another Populous/Powermonger style affair. Except this time the aim, rather than simply ruling a world or conquering it is to construct and run it and to make all its inhabitants feel really good! The aim is to elevate the quality of life to 100% - Utopia.

It's not difficult to grasp the aims and controls of the game. And it quickly becomes apparent that there are lots of problems thrown up by the idea of making everyone happy. For a start, if you spend all the money on hospitals, food production and month-long sports festivals, your populace will be content, but without any credible defence when the inevitable computer-controlled alien attack occurs.

Beginning from just a few key buildings, it's up to the player to construct the colony using icon-driven actions while inspecting the world in isometric 3D. There are almost no rules in this society. You can run things virtually any way you want, investing resources and time in whateever you like.The only factor that is missing is the option to try and run things as a dictatorship regime and make a certain part of the population very happy while keeping the workers ground down into the dirt. Still, that's not on, is it?

☆☆☆☆

## WARDNER SPECIAL

*Price* **Megadrive £39.99 Import**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **Visco**

There seems to be a trend in current Megadrive games (Sonic excepted) to wrap superb and addictive gameplay in hideously primitive graphics. Wardner Special is one of this happy band.

Plot-wise it's the usual rescue the girly from the evil baddy by jumpin' and fumpin' through umpteen baddy-infested levels of platforms and ladders, but it has several gameplay features that lift it out of the mire.

For a start, the amount of variety is incredible. Every step of the way seems to reveal some new obstacle or feature to overcome - spinning blades, lightning-lobbing clouds, climbable vines - which help sustain interest no end. Control over the hero is superb, allowing lots of Mario-esque mid-air manoeuvres. Probably the only major fault - apart from the terribly Master System-ish graphics - is the way the game sends the player quite a way back when he dies. Very annoying. However, this is the only real criticism of an otherwise great game.

☆☆☆☆

## WARZONE

*Price* **Amiga/Atari ST £20.99**
*Genre* **Shoot-'Em-Up**
*Publisher* **Core Design**

Once again a powerful terrorist organisation has invaded countries around the world, and as fate would have it only the player (and maybe a friend) have survived. A shoot-'em-up set firmly in the classic mould of Ikari Warriors, the screen scrolls downwards while all manner of enemy forces pour on-screen in their feeble attempt to stop the player .

The main opponents are troops with rifles and are basically cannon fodder to any half-decent hero. Scattered along the way are various other baddies armed with indirect grenade launchers allowing them to fire over walls. The obligatory end-of-level meanies include tanks, subs, helicopters, etc, etc.

Despite some new touches Warzone is basically a 90s Ikari Warriors, which is not necessarily a bad thing. The graphics and sound are nothing brilliant, but good nonetheless. Where it really succeeds is on the gameplay front - it's an addictive and fun blast, especially for two players.

☆☆☆☆

## WILD WHEELS

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga £25.53**
*Genre* **Sports Arcade**
*Publisher* **Ocean**

Another bizarre hybrid game, this time crossing Pole Position with Kick Off to produce a bizarre - but oddly playable - car-based future sport where vehicles take the place of humans in a customised five-a-side football game played in a giant stadium.

At first glance it looks nothing special, with miniature cars beep-beeping their way around an unconvincing 3D pitch, but playing the thing reveals it to be more fun than outward appearances would suggest. It's not Kick Off by any means, but the simplistic gameplay works well enough, and the variety of neat touches, such as different models of vehicles, weaponry and bonus tiles all help to raise the interest level. The only problem is the lastability, which is likely to be seriously short-lived once the few skills have been mastered - the program doesn't throw up anything in the way of new challenges to hold the player's attentions.

Ocean should be commended for making a conscious effort to produce something else other than the usual regurgitated claptrap where only the graphics and the licence changes from game to game, and though it bodes well for the future, Wild Wheels only half-hits its mark. Promising and original, but unfortunately limited.

☆☆☆

## WING COMMANDER II

*Price* **IBM PC £34.99**
*Genre* **Arcade Blast**
*Publisher* **Origin**

No matter what else you might say about the Wing Commander games, they look darned good. The trouble is, there isn't really much else to say about them. Well, perhaps that's a little harsh but here in the sequel to the much talked-about and little-played original, it's a case of more of the same.

Interstellar war with the Kilrathi continues, and in the most recent Kilrathi victory, the Confederation flagship Tiger's Claw has been destroyed by invisible Kilrathi stealth fighters. As the sole survivor of the assault, the player must first convince his federation comrades that the attack did genuinely take place and then lead a federation force to track them down and destroy them.

The missions available for the player to try are wide ranging and change in style in accordance with the development of the plot. At the outset, when things are pretty quiet, the player's orders are simply to patrol, which leads in turn to sporadic fights with Kilrathi craft.

Graphically excellent although particularly processor heavy, Wing Commander II certainly isn't a brilliant game. It's a worthy sequel to its predecessor but is the sort of title where that trite old phrase about trying before buying is one hundred percent appropriate.

☆☆☆


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make him jump over gaps or shoot at the weirdo aliens. However, in a unique twist, the towers used to rotate to follow Pogo's movement. Quite a graphical achievement on the Speccy! Now *Nebulus* has come to the GameBoy under the title Castelian. And while the name may have changed the game certainly hasn't. It still looks stunning and plays well but has a difficulty rating through the roof. However, completing a tower is extremely satisfying, so if you fancy a real challenge then you know where to come.

☆☆☆☆

## CHASE H.Q.

*Price* **GameGear £29.99** Import
*Genre* **Race Game**
*Publisher* **Taito**

There can be few readers who aren't familiar with the excellent coin-op or its sequel *S.C.I.* What a brainwave on the part of the designers to combine high-octane racing action with bumper-ramming action. The player takes on the role of an Armani-wearing Miami Vice style cop, chasing various perps in a souped-up Porsche with the aim of ramming their quarry off the road to make the arrest. The GameGear version is technically excellent, with lots of fast action and good sound, although the cars are a little small. Unfortunately it's about as tough as a peeled banana, and even Granny will soon be locking away Mr Big. You're busted? Well, actually you're more likely to just be bust after buying this - it's a lot of money for such a short-lived challenge.

☆☆☆

## CLOUD KINGDOMS

*Price* **Atari ST/Amiga £7.99**
*Genre* **Platform**
*Publisher* **GBH/Gremlin**

Cloud Kingdoms is a load of balls - bouncing balls, to be precise. (Ha! The old ones are the best!). As Terry the Ball, the player has to negotiate thirty-two huge multiway-scrolling levels, each of which floats high in the sky, collecting all the gems that litter to the narrow walkways. Terry has to take care not to leave the paths, else he'll fall to his doom in the void below. This isn't as easy as it sounds - Terry's rubbery body bounces wildly off walls and pillars, and parts of the floor may crumble beneath him. In addition, if Terry passes over arrows set in the floor they'll push him around, usually over the edge of the nearest chasm. If that weren't enough, other hostile spheroids wander the walkways, keen to see Terry's demise. Fortunately Terry can bounce over their heads with a tap of the fire button.

Cloud Kingdoms, formerly from Millenium, is an attractive game, with a strong console feel. The cutesy graphics, though looking a little dated now, do the trick, and the scrolling on both Amiga and ST versions is very smooth. The inertial control is a little tricky to get to grips with, but rewarding when mastered. Some features annoy, like the fact that its impossible to know where crumbling floor is until it's been bounced on, but overall this is an unmissable bargain at just under eight quid.

☆☆☆☆

## CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

*Price* **Amiga £TBA**
*Genre* **Adventure**
*Publisher* **Delphine/US Gold**

The plot for Cruise for a Corpse is firmly rooted in the Agatha Christie 'isolated location, plenty of suspects' crime story tradition, detailing how the player is invited to a Greek tycoon's yacht for a well-earned holiday only to get there and find his host bumped off by an unknown murderer. Before you can say "Inspector Wexford" the player is forced to don poncy moustache and tufty sideburns to solve the heinous crime.

After a lot of pre-release interest from the press, there were high hopes for Cruise for a Corpse. Is it the excellent game everyone seemed to think it'd be? Well, yes... and no. In the graphics and sound department it's exemplary, with large fluidly-animated sprites moving over exquisitely detailed backgrounds and plenty of suitable tunes and samples playing away in the background. All conspire to generate an

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# fiction

*LAST MONTH on LOVE ON THE GREEN BAIZE...*

*"If only dad could see us now."*
*"Yeah."*

*"These pesky Hexagons. As long as they're around, we'll never get to the top of the professional Snooker ladder."*
*"Relax, Bob. Tonight we will ensure that those pesky Hexagons will never bother us again. Tonight we will be champions of the world."*

*"Ladies and Gentemen, I have an announcement which will change the face of Snooker as we know it and send the Hexagon twins into exile forEVER!"*

*Now... the thrilling conclusion of... LOVE ON THE GREEN BAIZE*

**LOVE ON THE GREEN BAIZE: BOOK 2**

Dogdish took one more step forward and sneered a disgusting sneer at referee Len Jones. What few decaying teeth he had left were coated with a thick brown sludge created by Dogdish's filthy craving for nicotine and other drugs, which he took regularly in a failed attempt to enhance his otherwise miserable existence. He slid his blackened fingernail under the flap of the envelope and tore it open. Then he thrust his hand inside and produced a black-and-white photograph, letting the envelope fall to the floor - the papery thud sounded like a sledgehammer hitting a glass anvil as it echoed around the hushed open-air stadium.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" Len Jones demanded, booming. He'd been in the Snooker refereeing game for forty years, and he wasn't about to stand for any of this hullabaloo. He was already reaching into his pocket for his cosh (which he always carried for professional tournaments) when Bob Dogdish's slicky, lisp-inflicted brother Rob hobbled across the floor like a malformed hunchback, sniggering like an asthmatic hyena. "Aaah, you will shoon shee," he cackled, dribbling on the marble floor as he did so. He snatched the photograph from his brother's hands and held it up to one of the many TV cameras, which were beaming this pictures live around the world.

"Behold!" He exclaimed as the camera and the audience caught its first glimpse of the photograph. Twenty million people around the world held their breath - and several hundred commited suicide - as they saw it. It showed, quite clearly, the beloved Snooker World Champions Rex and Dex Hexagon selling heroin to young children outside a primary school.

"You shee?!" Rob hissed. "An... an anonymous source provided us with this photograph late last night. The source also provided us with this statement" - he produced a wad of typed sheets from his crumpled waistcoat - "which gives a detailed account of how the confounded Hexagon twins sold a variety of illegal narcotics to innocent children, and used the proceeds to bribe several top Snooker officials, so that they could become crooked world champions. Not only that, but we've evidence that the Hexagons watered down the purity of the heroin they sold using crushed Snooker chalk - STOLEN Snooker chalk! So now you see, such heinous criminals could never be allowed to be world champions! And with us as the Number One contenders, we hereby assume their title. All hail the new world champions! Officers, take them away!!"

Still there was silence. Save the clicking of boot heels on marble as two burly policemen strutted out from the wings into the auditorium - and towards the shocked Hexagons. Before either Rex or Dex could protest, the cuffs were slapped on and the disgraced Snooker-twins were frogmarched from the stadium, as Rob and Bob laughed horribly. "You shee, my dear Brother," Rob whispered. "Our roushe hash worked. Shoon the Earth will be in our grashp. HA HA HA HA!"

Rex and Dex sat under the blazing lights of Sun Hill Police Station's Interview Room 1 looking at the incriminating photograph on the chipped wooden desk in front of them. Their hands were cuffed behind the chairs and they were doing their best to shield their eyes from the anglepoise lamp's blinding light. As the first beads of sweat started to trickle down Rex's brow, an awesome shadowy figure appeared from out of the light - and switched it off. It took the brothers' pupils a few seconds to adjust, but when the haze finally cleared they couldn't fail to recognise - it was the staunch, no-nonsense yet ruggedly-handsome form of DI Frank Burnside from out of The Bill.

A few seconds passed, then Burnside loosened his paisley tie and leaned across the desk towards the two brothers. "I've got you bang to rights, you slaaags," he growled, holding up the photograph and accompanying document. "I've got the full SP here. You're gonna be doing hard porridge for this unless you squeal."

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Rex and Dex were beginning to worry. Normally they wouldn't have a care, as their lawyer, Sir Bartholomew Moulinex, was the finest QC in the country, and his phenomenal legal skills could get them off any charge they faced, no matter how damning the evidence. But he was caught in a traffic jam, and they knew that the super-tough Burnside may well be able to sweat a phoney confession out of them before Moulinex could get to the station. They'd seen The Bill and they knew what a hardman Burnside could be. He was a lot tougher than the carrot-topped pencil-neck Galloway who used to be in the show before him.

"Now we're gonna take this nice and slow," said Burnside slowly. "First I want to know the names of all your powder-sniffing pals. I want to know about the shipments, the deliveries, the accounts... every detail of your little Ajax empire. And then I want to know about all the blags that have gone down on this manor" - he leaned forward, coming face to face with Dex - "or you'll be banged up in stir for the rest of your natural, my son."

"Look," said Dex, using his special Snooker-karma meditation techniques to remain calm under this intense pressure, "I know what you're talking about, but we haven't done anything wrong. That picture is a forgery, and the information in that document entirely fabricated. We are innocent, and this whole thing is obviously a thinly-veiled scheme by the villainous Dogdish brothers to frame us so that they can be Snooker champs."

"Oh, you reckon?" Burnside roared. "Well, I've lost money on you slags in the past, and I intend to make sure that you pair get nailed right to the wall where you belong. You can tell your little sob story to Judge Otis Ballbuster in the morning. You're in court at Ten am, charged with narcotics smuggling and chalk theft."

"But we can prove we're innocent!" Rex protested. "Let us go and we'll bring you the real villains - the Dogdish brothers - along with proof of their guilt. We know you're a fair man, Burnside. Just give us a chance - and if you don't, we'll tell everyone that you're the bloke who does the Bob Hoskins-type voice on the Weetabix adverts."

Burnside seemed to think this over. He knew that if his guvnor found out that he was moonlighting for Nabisco, he'd be thrown off the force pronto. And the law was all he lived for - well, that and saying "If you know what's good for you" in a stupid gravelly voice.

"Okay, you've got a deal," he said finally. "I'll give you 12 hours to prove your theory correct. But I don't want any screw-ups, and if you can't find the evidence you're looking for, I want you in court tomorrow on time to face the music. Got it?"

Minutes later, Rex and Dex collected their cues and other valuables from the desk sergeant and left the station on a mission to clear their name. Burnside smiled and waved them out the door, then turned to his his boss, DCI Reid, staring at him grimly.

"What is the meaning of releasing the two prime suspects in the Hexagon case?" she asked.

"I believe they're innocent. I'm giving them a chance to clear their name," he replied.

"Jesus, Frank, you're not in the Bronx anymore. We have rules and regulations here in Sun Hill. I know you've never really been the same since that drug dealer killed your partner, but we've got to do things by the book."

"Ma'am, as long as we have to play by these bullshit rules and the drug kingpins don't, we're going to lose."

"Frank, I'm sorry, but given the circumstances I have no option but to suspend you from active duty. Give me your shield and your piece, please."

Dutifully, Burnside handed them over.

"Now go home and get some rest. This damn personal vendetta of yours has cost the department thousands. Maybe if you take a vacation, you can come back to the job with a different perspective."

Burnside tried to think about it, but as soon as he closed his eyes, he was tortured once more by the recurring nightmare vision of his former partner Maxwell Raisin being mown down by a hail of bullets fired by the hideous drug overlord Boris Vax that fateful night five years ago. When he opened his eyes again he knew what he must do.

"Take us to Hexagon mansion," Dex Hexagon barked to the mini-cab driver.

"Oh, you mean Dogdish mansion. It's the new world champions that live there now. They've laid claim to all the Hexagon's possessions. Terrible business eh? Everyone liked them."

"Yes," said Dex purposefully as he turned to his brother. "And they will do again." Dex produced his two-piece cue and slowly began to unscrew it. When the two pieces were separated, Dex reached inside the bottom piece and produced a pencil-slim rifle barrel. From the other piece he produced several tiny nuts, bolts and assorted metal pieces and when he re-assembled the whole caboodle the cue had become a high-powered sniper rifle with telescopic laser sight. He looked to his brother, who had done the same with his cue, and the twins slapped their magazines of armour-piercing mercury-tipped hollow-points in with a metallic kerchunk. "Let's go get some payback," said Rex.

"Yes," agreed Dex.

In the few short hours since Rob and Bob Dogdish had taken residence in Hexagon mansion, they had managed to transform it from the tasteful piece of British heritage that it had always been into a garishly-decorated cultural nightmare. The tapestries and old masters had been thrown out in favour of two-bob pictures of Dogs playing poker and mis-spelled graffiti. Empty shandy cans littered the floor (the Dogdishes never could take their beer) and the brothers themselves lay on a pair of gaudy sun-loungers eating cold supermarket saveloys - their favourite food. But their disgusting feast was rudely interrupted when the giant oak door to the illustrious main hall exploded in a ball of flame and the Hexagon twins stormed in through the burning wreckage, toting their cue-guns. The Dogdishes dropped to their knees and started begging for their lives like the stinking cowards they were.

"Relax," said Rex. "We're not going to hurt you. Dex." He motioned to his brother and together the Hexagons laid down their weapons. "All we want you to do is confess to the police that you framed us and everything will be alright. Okay?"

Bob looked to his brother Rob and winked. Slowly, their right arms moved around to their backs, where they each kept concealed a .22 snubnosed magnum. Their hands tightened around the grips.

"No, not okay," Rob sneered. "We'll shee you in HELL!" At that moment, the Dogdishes drew their guns and levelled them at the heads of the shocked Hexagons. The twins went for their guns, but it was too late...

Two shots rang out, and Rex and Dex flinched, thinking it was all over. Well, it was, but not for them. There was an explosion of claret and the Dogdish brothers were thrown backwards by the force of a 10mm bullet in each of their foreheads, and crashed through the fifth-storey french windows and down onto the spiked railings below.

The sound of gunshots still ringing in their ears, Rex and Dex looked up and saw, standing in a cloud of plaster dust, the figure of Burnside holding a smoking .357. He smiled.

"Looks like you were right after all. I hope this little incident hasn't put you off Snooker playing," he said.

Rex stood up and dusted himself off, then grabbed a cue from the rack nearby and chalked it carefully.

"Not at all," he said enigmatically. "How about a game?"

THE END?

**WRITE ON, READERS!**

We've been absolutely overwhelmed by the response to our call last month for aspiring writers to contribute their stories to ACE Fiction! It seems that there's an awful lot of budding Jackie Collins' out there, and the fiction we've so far received has been of a very high quality indeed. The stories have been based around such classics as Elite, Ikari Warriors and Manic Miner - and though they've all been absolutely excellent, we felt that we just had to print this entry from young author Nicholas Wimbledon, based on Sega's Golden Axe, While not exactly adhering to the "make it funny" guidelines we set down last month and taking thinga a bit too seriously, manages to be inadvertently hilarious all the same.

## VENGEANCE OF THE WARRIOR!

**by Nicholas Wimbledon**

When the warrior returned to his village it was to the scene of carnage. Bodies of the dead & dying lay scattered around like so many seeds in the wind. The stench of burning thatch mingled with that of flesh and hardened though he was, the great warrior "Ax-Battler" couldn't help but gag at the sight of those he had returned from a quest to see, only to find them drowning in their own blood. But grief gave way to rage & he roared out loud. To his surprise he was answered by another, not far away, somewhere ahead of him in the forest. He ran faster than anyone watching would have believed possible for one of his considerable size, into the midst of the trees towards the source of the fierce cry.

Brushing away the undergrowth he charged into a clearing to find a hideous beast with razor sharp claws mutilating a body which barely moved, but was still capable of offering some feeble resistance. Ax-Battler was blinded both with fury & overwhelming grief, as the body, that of a middle-aged woman, was tossed sideways; his mother now moved no more.

The best turned at Ax-Battler's cry & charged him, an axe now in hand. The barbarian charged also, not bothering to draw his mighty sword from his back. In the middle of the clearing, the Orc & warrior met, neither attempting to dodge the other's blows. The Orc swung his axe down at the human's unprotected head, but the warrior grabbed the shaft, held it high, & butted the Orc a tremendous blow upon the skull. Before the beast could recover, he tossed the axe away, grabbed the monster's head in both hands, and turning, hurled it over his shoulder to crash into an oak. The impact must have splintered every bone in the creature's repulsive body.

But the warrior couldn't stay longer to bury his mother, for closing rapidly were a large group of thenm which even he wouldn't be able to defeat. He glanced once at his prone mother and gritting his teeth took off north, away from the marauding Orcs.

Under the cover of darkness, he carefully made his way around Orc encampments searching for any prisoners they may have taken. Finding none he set about his new & most dangerous quest - that for revenge.

He had noticed the Orcs carrying trinkets & plundered goods, & so after a short while he discovered the identity of his foe. Firstly he spotted an Orc carrying a banner - that of a Golden Axe. He recognised the emblem of the King of Yuria immediately, & made his way westwards through the woods, by passing several villages, until he reached the Great Plans. From here on, his destination: the king's castle from whence the banner must have been plundered, his journey far more dangerous than it had been. Surviving villagers he met informed him of his adversary. It seemed that the one he fol-

lowed was called Death Adder. He had heard of him before in his travels but had thought that he was not powerful or a threat. But he learned that the magic Golden Axe had been stolen by him, making him near invincible. Not only that, for he had somehow united the Orcs from the East & the Amazons from the North, with promises of wealth and power. They now fought for him alone. Still this was not all - he also had the king, queen & their daughter captive in their own castle, & in a brief span of time had demanded taxes so high that many people could not pay & had fled. Time was running out for Ax-Battler: a threat had been made that the magic axe which held demonic forces at bay, would be destroyed if the taxes were not paid. The first collection was due very soon. With much haste, Ax-Battler journeyed on towards the castle and his destiny.

One night while he slept, a dwarf visited him. A careless move, namely a misplaced foot, & he was greeted by the tip of a sword. Ax-Battler grinned.

"How may I help you?" he enquired rising to his feet & looking down at the would-be thief Nervously the dwarf laughed. "Nay friend, it is I who can help you!"

Ax-Battler looked bemused. "How so?"

"My friend I have a potion for you. Twill make you strong as..as.."

"A bear?"

"Why... to be sure a bear!"

"And I suppose you were checking to see if I had the means to pay for it, before you awoke me" he asked in mock cheerfulness.

The dwarf agreed. Ax-Battler dropped his sword and picked the little thief up by the scruff of the neck.

"I can see you don't need it!" shrilled the dwarf.

Ax-Battler put him down & watched as the wretched man backed away.

"AAAARRRGGGHH!" Ax charged & the dwarf ran faster than the wind yelling in fright. Laughing Ax turned & gathering his things got an early start.

Noon saw the warrior high up the mountain approaching Eagle Island: A living yet imobile giant Eagle - the product of the mighty wizards who once lived many eons ago. As he reached the Eagle he was aware of danger all around, yet he could see nothing. He continued his trek.

After a few hours he stopped dead still. Before him a mound of earth was quaking. He watched and & waited. A gleaming white bone hand appeared, then a skull, until before him stood a skeleton! Behind this one, another pulled itself from the ground, & another & another! They advanced on him shakily, joints clacking noisily. Each once held both sword and shield. Ax-Battler took a step back & turned to flee, but four more had appeared behind him, blocking his escape. He had to fight! Swinging his sword about him kept them at bay but he knew that soon one of them would creep in uder his guard & put an end to him. He had to do something. Then he remembered. Long ago he had been taught a word which he had been told would someday save his life - but only once. A word of power - a word of magic. He needed it now. As his enemy moved in on him he closed his eyes and spoke "the word".

Unspeakable power flew through him - raw energy pulsed through his veins. He called forth that which the word allowed him. The power of volcano magic. Rocks exploded around him, but never did a piece strike him. Erupting from the ground, granite smote his foe and when the echoes had died away, he opened his eyes. The skeletons were crushed & buried beneath enormous rocks. He but glanced at them and continued towards the now visible castle.

When the barbarian fought his way into the castle, he left a trail of death behind him. Death-Adder could scarcely believe it when the warrior approached him & demanded the Axe. He could not understand how the man had made it to him alive & unhurt. However, he was quick to retaliate.

"You want the Axe fool?" he shouted. "Take it with my blessing!"

He lunged at Ax-Battler, the glowing Axe held tightly in his hand. Despite his bulk, Death-Adder moved with agility, his cloak swirling around him.

They fought like demons, giving & receiving blows that would crush a lesser being. But Ax-Battler was tiring. He was clearly the least powerful. A slash across the chest & he was down, lying helpless upon the ground. He was going to die - he had failed. Death-Adder stood over him, axe raised over his head.

"I admit to some respect for you!" he said, preparing the final blow.

"But I have none for you!" replided Ax-Battler. "You are about to die & yet you don't care?" he asked bemused.

"You can't kill me with that!" spat 'Battler. "You know nothing about its powers." he lied.

"You're bluffing!" replied the giant.

"Maybe. Strike me down."

Death-Adder was uncertain. This couldn't be true. Could it? He smiled. Of course not. The axe sailed down towards its target, but Death-Adder misplaced his strike. In that moment Ax-Battler struck back. His sword pierced Death-Adder's heart. In an instant, the Gold Axe lifted itself into the air, turned over & over, then split Death-Adder's skull.

Ax-Battler was left wondering whether he had been right or not.

The King & his queen and daughter were rescued. For some unexplained reason the Amazons returned to their lair, & the Orcs to theirs. Perhaps they realised that power would not be theirs after all, or perhaps the magic of the Axe had affected them, but whatever the reason, they retreated. The land of Yuria was safe once again. For now, the powers of evil were at bay, but for how long, no-one knew.


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# THE BLITTER END

*An industry on the edge.*
*A conspiracy on the rise.*
*A magazine on the loose.*

Once, he was programmed to slag off the industry.
Now... his mission is to protect it.

## *THE BLITTER END II*

This time he's back... for good!

Yes, yes, alright. Blitter is supposed to be dead, and in theory it is. You're looking at a new, refreshed, revived Blitter. It's just that the old Blit was so popular, and the industry is in such a state of filth and decay, you can smell it.

Sometime the stench is so strong it gives us headaches. So we're back, with the full intention of bringing you the latest news of the hottest scandals, along with various other things that help to fill the magazine up.

***

Everyone had a right old laugh on the closing night of the ECES Show in Earl's Court when Renegade Software boss *Tom Watson* was spotted gate-crashing an exclusive Ocean riverboat party on the Thames. Ocean's *Gary Bracey* was having none of it, and promptly ejected Watson, apparently amid cheers and applause from the rest of the industry guests. ACE has been informed that Watson could probably had stayed on the boat and boogied the night away with the rest of the industry if only he'd come up with something better than "Er... John said it was okay. No, I mean Dave. Pete! Ronny..."

***

Hard as it is to believe, by the time we get to the back of the magazine, we sometimes find ourselves short of interesting things to write. As is the case this month. So in a rather poor attempt to fill up the remaining space, We thought we'd tell you about how some of the industry's top-level people started out in less glamorous professions...

Virgin Games' Marketing Manager *Andrew Wright* may be a high-roller today, but twelve years ago you'd have found him selling primitive consoles and handhelds in the newly-formed computer department of Hamley's toy store in London's Regent Street. Interestingly enough, Andrew was actually demoted from Assistant Floor Manager to Sales Assistant for kicking a fellow worker in the genitals! "Because he was pulling my braces," Wright claims today. Some things never change, it seems...

Former Activision supremo and now boss of Acclaim UK, *Rod Cousens* preceded his entry into the industry by selling insurance. He also worked as a schoolteacher, as did US Gold head honcho *Geoff Brown*.

Before *Mark Scriven* became advertising manager of Commodore User and The One and later moved to head up Mirrorsoft's European operation, he used to earn a bob or two by selling ice creams and nuts on a beach in the south of France. And who was he working for? None other than the head of Entertainment International, *Simon Jefferies*.

Certain members of Ocean's board of directors have seen the seamier side of life, too. *Gary Bracey* used to be a trainee manager for Littlewoods Stores, while *Paul Patterson* used to dress up as a gorilla to deliver singing telegrams!

Just to round up the best of the rest... Konami's development manager *Colin Fuidge*, along with System 3-running brothers *Mark* and *Adrian Cale* all used to work in MacDonalds (with Adrian also working behind a bar at Butlins), Vivid Image Design director *Mev Dinc* was once a cable-winder for a cable company, Amiga Power's consultant editor *Gary Penn* worked on a building site and dabbled in writing adventure games with his mates, and Strangeways Software director *Gary Liddon* once spent Christmas walking around a department store dressed as Smurfette - and thought it may be a breach of the Official Secrets Act to tell you, the same Mr Liddon was also a top secret agent with the codename Black Dimond! Hope we haven't blown your cover, Gaz!

***

Here at ACE Towers we know only too well how difficult it can be for you lot to make your way through the scores of computer magazines you read each month. Yes, the world of software reviews is a battleground, so to give you a helping hand in cutting through the waffle and making more authoratative purchase decisions, we provide for you - *The Definitive Guide To Games Review Terms.*

*I couldn't believe it when I loaded this up!*
Actually I could, because I saw it last month when I did the Work in Progress.

*Try before you buy.*
I can't be bothered to criticise this game constructively, and I've only got one line left anyway after all that waffle, so this will have to do.

*We knew the game was going to be good, but no-one prepared us for this!!!*
I am hopeless. Please kill me.

*Fans of the coin-op will be impressed.*
It's vaguely similar to the coin-op and I don't want to annoy the software company.

*The game boasts a wicked thumpin' Betty Boo sampled soundtrack!*
But has absolutely no playability, so I'll try not to mention that.

*The graphics are superfluous.*
I think the word "superfluous" means "good".

*Best Coin-op conversion ever?*
Probably not, but at least you picked the magazine up.

*It's their best game yet!*
It's their latest game, and comes in a slightly bigger box.

*The depth of the strategy is incredible!*
I can't make head nor tail of it, but the big thick manual is very impressive.

***

If you're a little bemused by the pull-out quotes in the *Lotus 2* review (pages 52 - 57), fear not! You're not dyslexic. It's just that in our otherwise thorough quest for excellence some gremlins (ho ho) or something got into the system and the mistake wasn't spotted before it was too late. But if some bright spark can piece the sentences back together, fill in the gaps and tell us what the quotes SHOULD have said, there's a software prize waiting. Entries to the usual ACE address...

***

Apparently the latest magazine craze is to take really old games that nobody buys anymore, and slag them off in order to look big and hard. We thought this was quite a good idea, so at the risk of looking like copycats, we've done something similar.

### SPACE INVADERS

PUBLISHER: N/A PRICE: N/A
AVAILABILITY: N/A

Och aye the noo. This game is about as tasty as a stale haggis. When I was walking down Argylle Street in my kilt the other day, I was thinking "Well I'll be Nessy's Uncle if *Space Invaders* isn't a load of rubbish." And it is. The graphics are nee good at all, and the playability is not as good as watching Taggart or going sword dancing with Russ Abbot and Lorraine Kelly. All in all you would be well advised to keep your pennies in your sporran, and if you already have this game, toss it like you would toss a caber, Jimmy. All in all I think I am very clever, even though I haven't said anything vaguely constructive. Are ye on for a wee dram? It's a braw bricht moonlicht nicht the nicht. You take the high road and I'll take the low road. The noo.

●*Angus MacKojak*

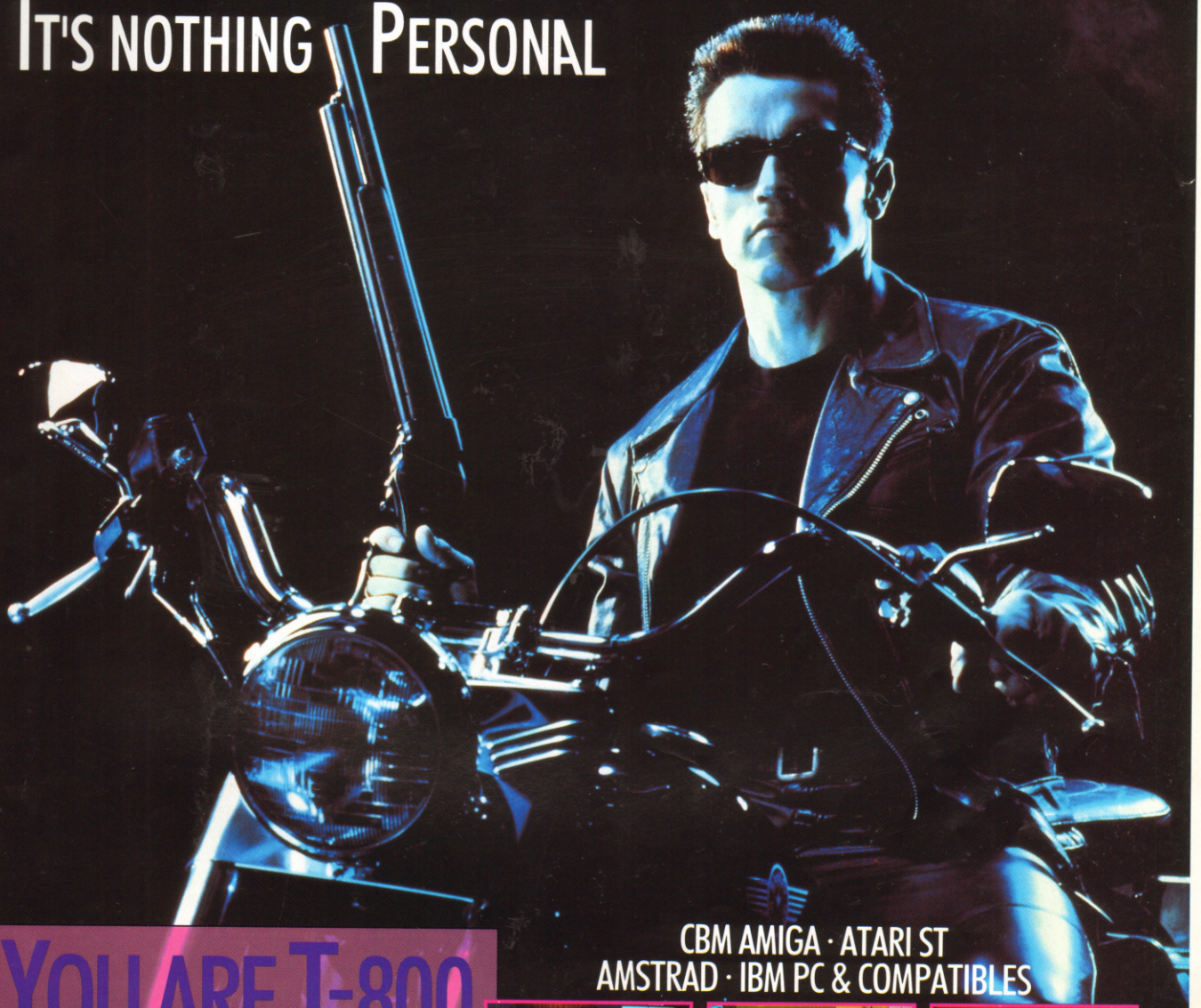
***

And so to bed. There's only so much filth and slander you can fit on a page

# TERMINATOR 2™

# JUDGMENT DAY

## IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL



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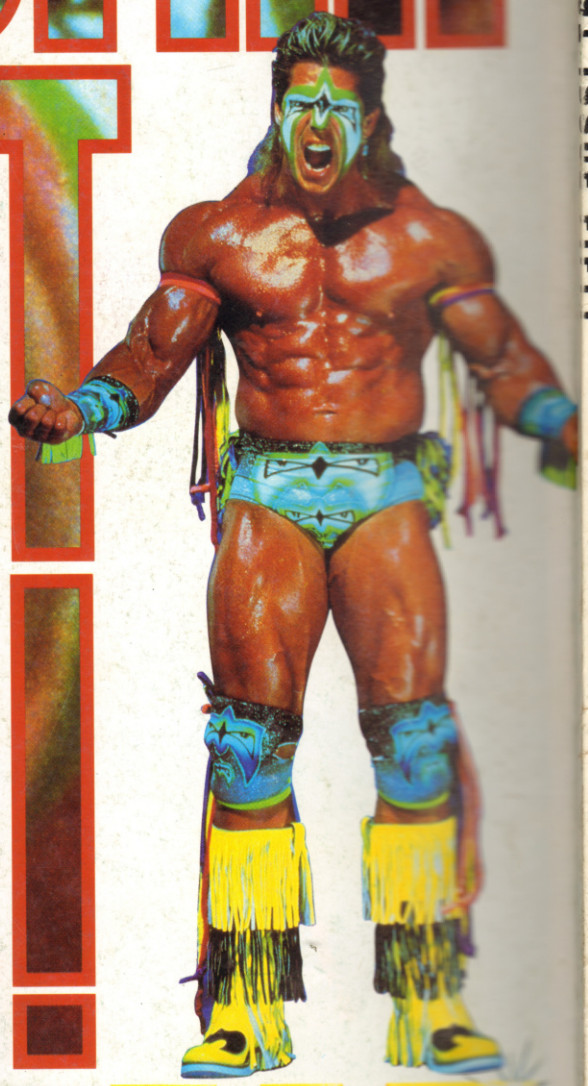

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ACE NOVEMBER 1991 ISSUE FIFTY

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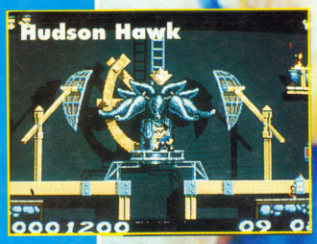


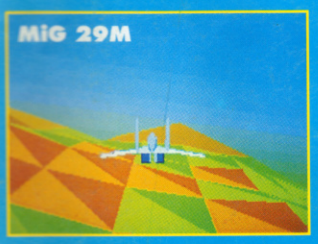


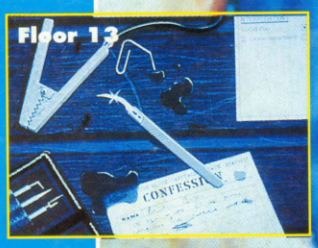


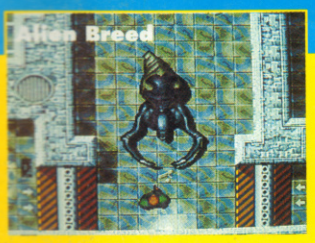

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